ANCIENT INDIA
In Historical Outline

This book is a substantially modified and enlarged version of the author's *Ancient India: An Introductory Outline* (Delhi, 1977) and surveys the major developments in India's social, economic and cultural history up to the end of the ancient period and the beginning of the early middle ages and explains the rise and growth of states with reference to their material basis. Special attention has been paid to the elements of change and continuity in society, economy and culture, and to the changing forms of exploitation and consequent social tensions as well as to the role of religion and superstition in society. The book demolishes the popular historiographical stereotypes created by the Hindu-chauvinist communal writings. It also gives the lie to the view that the Indian society has been stagnant and changeless—a view which was propagated by Western scholars in the heyday of British imperialism and continues to be peddled ingeniously in our own times.

The assassination of Mahatma Gandhi and the demolition of the Baburi Masjid are two unforgettable milestones in the unfolding of the backward-looking Hindu revivalist and fascist politics of contemporary India.

Since both Harappa and Mohenjodaro are situated now in Pakistan, the Hindu revivalists are busy locating the epicentre of the Harappan culture in the elusive Saraswati valley.

Dwijendra Narayan Jha graduated from Presidency College, Calcutta, in 1957 and obtained M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in 1959 and 1964 respectively from Patna University where he taught history up to 1975. He is currently professor of history at the University of Delhi.

Professor Jha has lectured at universities and other centres of education in India and abroad and was National Lecturer in History, University Grants Commission, during 1984-5. His works include *Revenue System in Post-Maurya and Gupta Times* (Calcutta, 1967), *Ancient India: An Introductory Outline* (Delhi, 1977), *Studies in Early Indian Economic History* (Delhi, 1980), *Economy and Society in Early India: Issues and Paradigms* (Delhi, 1993) and a number of articles published in Indian and foreign journals. He has to his credit several edited works including *Feudal Social Formation in Early India* (Delhi, 1987) and *Society and Ideology in India: Essays in Honour of Professor R.S. Sharma* (Delhi, 1996).

Professor D.N. Jha was president of the ancient Indian history section of the Indian History Congress in 1979 and its General Secretary from 1985 to 1988.

ANCIENT INDIA

In Historical Outline

Revised and Enlarged Edition

D. N. JHA



MANOHAR
2009

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IN MEMORIAM

DAMODAR DHARMANAND KOSAMBI

(31 July 1907–29 June 1966)

Contents

Illustrations

Maps

Preface to the Second Edition

The present book is a substantially modified and enlarged version of my *Ancient India: An Introductory Outline*, first published in 1977 It has since had nine reprints in English and eight in Hindi as well as a Chinese edition (1984). The survival of the book for more than two decades has forced me to both review and revise it. All the chapters of the book have, therefore, been rewritten and most of the points made earlier have been elaborated on the basis of recent researches which have brought about some change in my perception of the historical processes at work in ancient India without, necessarily, making me take an academic somersault. The bibliography has been updated and made more detailed to enable the non-specialist reader to investigate points which may appear to him worth pursuing. Revision has thus meant rewriting which has made the book quite different from its earlier version. This should explain why it is being issued under a modified title.

I have always benefited from interaction with my students and professional colleagues but for whose criticisms the book could not have taken its present shape. In the course of its preparation I have received help from a number of friends and well wishers some of whom insist on anonymity. I cannot, however, restrain myself from expressing my gratitude to Professor R.S. Sharma who has extended unhesitating support to my academic endeavours during the last four decades. Professor Shingo Einoo of the Institute of Oriental Culture, University of Tokyo, found time to discuss with me the various aspects of brahmanical rituals and their social context. Professor K.M. Shrimali, Dr Nayanjot Lahiri, Dr B.P. Sahu, Dr R.K. Chattopadhyaya and Dr V.M. Jha drew my attention to some recent publications; and Dr Monica Juneja helped me by interpreting some writings in German. Mrs Suchitra Gupta and Mr D.N. Gupta used their influence to get some rare books for my use. Mr Bhola Nath Varma of Manohar

Publishers & Distributors gave me valuable editorial advice. Mr J.B. Khanna of the Delhi University Library System and Mr Parmanand Sahay of the Indian Council of Historical Research, New Delhi, ungrudgingly allowed me to consult the books which are difficult to get in Delhi. Ratan Lal, Ashutosh and Jagriti have rendered bibliographical assistance. Mr Shyam Narain Lal has supplied the maps and Mr Ramesh Jain of the Manohar Publishers & Distributors has expedited the publication of the book. Gopal and Amarnath have helped in various ways. Dr C.M. Jha and Dr (Mrs) R.K. Jha have always stood by me in difficult times. I am grateful to all of them. In revising the last chapter of the book I have made use of the data collected by me for a research project sponsored and funded by the Indian Council of Social Science Research, New Delhi. I take this opportunity to thank them.

I place on record my gratitude to my late mother-in-law Saraswatee Sinha who constantly goaded me to complete the work but did not live to see it in print. I wish I could find right words to express my indebtedness to my wife Rajrani whose robust optimism has been a constant source of inspiration.

This book is dedicated to the memory of the late lamented Damodar Dharmanand Kosambi who granted me the privilege of working under his guidance during his field trips to the villages of Bihar in the last years of his life. It is a pity that the compilation of his papers on Indology done by me nearly two decades ago for publication by the Indian Council of Historical Research, New Delhi, has become the victim of the pettifoggery of some 'friends'.

25 December 1998 D.N. JHA

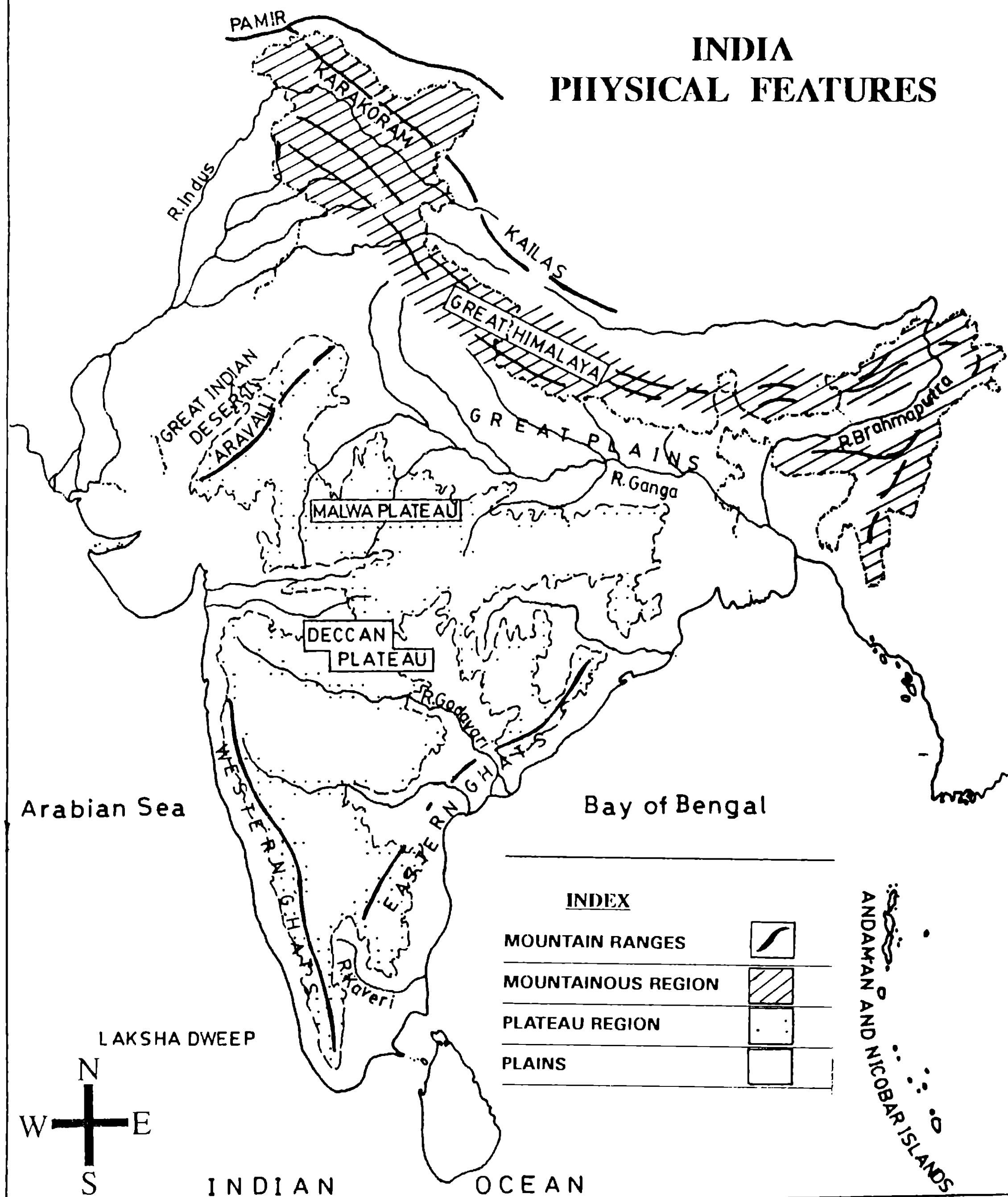
Preface to the First Edition

The present book is primarily meant for general readers who have some interest in India's early history. It surveys the main historical developments in ancient India up to the end of the Gupta rule in the 6th century AD and takes into account the recent studies by specialists on the subject.

The draft of the book was read by Professor R.S. Sharma, head of the department of history, University of Delhi, whose suggestions and incisive comments have helped me a great deal. I am grateful to Professor A.L. Basham, Australian National University, Canberra, who has made me think afresh on many points. My thanks are due to Shri S. Sengupta for drawing maps, Shri Kameshwar Prasad, lecturer in history, Patna University, for preparing the index, and to the Archaeological Survey of India for the illustrations. I am also thankful to my friends Professor R.L. Shukla, Shri Mohit Sen, Shri M.B. Rao and Shri Subodh Roy for their keen interest in the completion of the work. I do not know how to adequately express my thanks to my wife Rajrani for assisting me silently in various ways.

Delhi
15 March 1977

D.N. Jha


INDIA
PHYSICAL FEATURES
PAMIR
KARAKORAM
R.Indus
KAILAS
GREAT HIMALAYA
GREAT INDIAN DESERTS
ARAVALLI
GREAT PLAINS
R.Brahmaputra
R.Ganga
MALWA PLATEAU
DECCAN PLATEAU
R.Godavari
WESTERN GHATS
EASTERN GHATS
R.Kaveri
Arabian Sea
Bay of Bengal
LAKSHA DWEEP
ANDAMAN AND NICOBAR ISLANDS
INDEX
MOUNTAIN RANGES
MOUNTAINOUS REGION
PLATEAU REGION
PLAINS
N
W
E
S
INDIAN
OCEAN

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

For long centuries India was known to the rest of the world only through stray references to it in classical Greek and Roman literature. In the eighteenth century, however, we come across a few Jesuit fathers in the peninsular region making a systematic effort to understand the life of the Indian people. Father Hanxleden, active in the Malabar area from the end of the seventeenth century to the fourth decade of the eighteenth, wrote the first Sanskrit grammar in a European language, which remained unpublished. Father Couerdoux, in 1767, was the first to recognize the affinity between Sanskrit and European languages. The foundation of Indology, however, was laid not by Jesuit missionaries but by officers of the English East India Company. A trading organization at the time of its inception in 1600, it gradually acquired territories which were later to become the building blocks of the British empire. The transformation of a trading partner into a ruling power, though an area of absorbing study, is not our concern here. But it is necessary to bear in mind that historical writing—in the modern sense—on early India began as a sequel to the establishment of the English East India Company. The growing administrative responsibilities of the Company, especially after 1765 when the Mughals granted it the right to collect revenues and administer civil justice in Bengal, made it necessary for its officers to gain familiarity with the laws, habits, customs, and history of the Indian people. Many administrators therefore evinced keen interest in Indian literature and culture. In 1776 N.B. Halhed translated into English the most authoritative among all the early Indian legal texts, the lawbook of Manu, which appeared in German two years later. In 1785, Charles Wilkins rendered into English the *Bhagavadgita*, the most popular religious text of the upper caste Hindus, to be followed in 1787, by his translation of the *Hitopadesha*, a popular collection of

fables composed by Narayana in the twelfth century in Bengal. H.T. Colebrooke, who had around this time become associated with the collection of revenue in Tirhut and was able to master Sanskrit, wrote extensively on the Indian concept of time, religious rites and customs and various other aspects of Indian culture on the basis of intensive study of the original texts.

The most important of the Company's officers who gave a real boost to Indian studies was Sir William Jones. He came to Calcutta as a judge of the Supreme Court of Bengal in 1783 and founded the Asiatic Society of Bengal in the following year. The Society and its journal, *Asiatic Researches*, provided a much needed forum for Oriental studies and can be regarded as a landmark in the revelation of the traditional thought and culture of India. A polyglot with knowledge of Hebrew, Arabic, Persian, Turkish and Sanskrit and a smattering of Chinese, Jones translated the *Shankuntala* of Kalidasa (which drew unqualified admiration from Herder and Goethe and reached an extremely wide European readership), the *Gitagovinda*, and legal texts like the *Al Sirajiyyah*, and the *Manavadharmashastra*. Intensive research on the Muslim and Hindu laws of inheritance undertaken by Jones and his British contemporaries may be seen as an attempt to break the Indian monopoly of legal knowledge and assert British judicial power. The efforts of Sir William Jones were followed by the establishment of the Bombay Asiatic Society in 1804 and of the Asiatic Society of Great Britain in 1823. All this gave a stimulus to the study of ancient Indian history and culture, and Indological studies no longer remained the preoccupation of Company officers in India. Interest in Indian culture was aroused at a number of European universities where several scholars worked on Sanskrit and related subjects. The best known of the early Orientalists and Indologists was Max Mueller who never visited India and spent most of his time in England. The affinity between Sanskrit and certain European languages, once discovered, was stressed. This may partially explain the growing interest in Indology outside England. It also gave rise to the idea of a common Indo-European homeland and heritage. The Aryans in India came to be regarded as the brethren of the Europeans. Some upper class Indians like Keshub Chandra Sen took this literally and identified themselves with the British people. A distinction was drawn between Aryans and non-Aryans, and a variety

of virtues were attributed to the former. This in turn gave rise to the Aryan/Dravidian dichotomy amply reflected in historical writings on early India.

Several early Orientalists like Max Mueller spoke glowingly about the unchanging Indian village communities. They thought of India as a country of philosophers given to metaphysical speculation with little concern for their mundane existence. Indian society was depicted as idyllic, and as being devoid of any tension or social discord. Possibly ill at ease with the changes caused by rapid industrialization in the West, they found a utopia in India and sought their own identity in it. Max Mueller thus took the Sanskritic name Moksha Mula. Some of his ideas were misconstrued by the British to emphasize (sometimes quite crudely) that Indians were not fit to govern themselves, given as they were primarily to metaphysical thought. By and large his perception of India, recently described as part of some kind of 'Indomania', was not acceptable in nineteenth-century England where the intellectual scene was dominated by Christian missionaries led by Charles Grant and the Utilitarians, especially James Mill. Grant and Mill did not share the early Orientalist view of India, and their writings give ample evidence of hostility to Indian culture. They are therefore said to have created an 'Indophobia'

The Christian missionaries had little sympathy for Hinduism, which, in their view, was 'at best the work of human folly and at worst the outcome of a diabolic inspiration' The people of India, according to Charles Grant, lived in a 'degenerate' condition because of Hinduism, the source of dishonesty, perjury, selfishness, social divisions, debasement of women and sexual vice. Though not a missionary himself, Grant was an important personage in missionary circles, and exercised a lasting and strong influence on nineteenth-century British thought on India. His Anglicist bias made him plead strongly for the conversion of Indians to Christianity. It seems to have received memorable expression in the famous *Minute on Indian Education* (1835) authored by Thomas Babington Macaulay who had a high profile Evangelical family background.

The Utilitarians seem to have had much in common with the hostile missionary attitude to India as is clear from James Mill's three-volume *History of British India*, first published in 1817 It became popular enough to go into its fifth edition by 1858, though H.H.

Wilson, the first Professor of Sanskrit at Oxford, was contemptuous of Mill's perception of Indian culture and went to the extent of saying that 'its tendency was evil' Mill divided Indian history into three periods, the Hindu, Muslim and British. The seeds of communal historiography were thus sown. Unduly critical of the people and their culture, Mill postulated that contemporary as well as ancient India was barbarous and antirational. Indian civilization, according to him, showed no concern for political values and India had been ruled by a series of despots. Stagnant since its inception, Indian society was inimical to progress. All this was based on a grossly distorted version of the early Orientalist writings on India. In his book Mill was obviously making a case for changing Indian society through British legislation. This he was doing without ever having visited the country or knowing any of its languages—a fact he tried hard to justify by making the facile claim to writing a 'judging history'. Mill's *History* was one of the prescribed texts at the institutions like Haileybury College where English officers received their training before coming to India. Hence the historical writings on India by British administrators betray the influence of Mill in considerable measure.

The best known of the British-administrator historians on ancient India was Vincent A. Smith. He came to India in 1869 as a member of the Indian Civil Service and remained in service until 1900. He wrote all his nine books on Indian history after retirement. Of these his *Early History of India*, published in 1904, was based on a deep study of the primary sources available at the time. It was the first systematic survey of early Indian history and remained perhaps the most influential textbook for nearly fifty years and is sometimes used by scholars and students even today. Less hostile to India than Mill, Smith nevertheless believed that it had a long tradition of oppressive despots—a tradition which ended only with the advent of the British. The implication was that Indians were not fit to rule themselves. In keeping with the main trends of contemporary British historiography, Smith gave much attention to great men in history; and Alexander, Ashoka, Chandragupta II and Akbar became his heroes. Smith exaggerated the ruthlessness of ancient Indian kings. The theory of governance in the *Arthashastra* was to him like that of imperial Germany with which Britain was later at war. He described Kautilya's

penal code as 'ferociously severe', conveniently ignoring the fact that other ancient law codes were no less so.

The corpus of literature generated by the British scholars on early India was not univocal and it is possible to identify differences in the perceptions of individual authors. Nevertheless it remains true that the British wrote on early Indian history with a view to providing historical justification for the Raj and its exploitation of Indian resources. This quite often led to gross distortion of historical evidence. Such portrayals are viewed as part of the Orientalist discourse in which Orientalism is interpreted 'as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and for having authority over the Orient' All this, however, does not negate the value and importance of the imperialist historiography.

British views of the early Indian history came to be strongly challenged by Indian scholars influenced by Indian reformist leaders, and also by the growing nationalism and political awakening. Ramakrishna Paramahansa asserted that Hinduism embraced all religions in its fold. His disciple Vivekananda and later Annie Besant, sought to prove the superiority of the Hindu religion. Bankim Chandra preached that a revival of Hinduism was essential for the growth of India as a nation. Dayanand Saraswati, the founder of the Arya Samaj, gave the call 'Back to the Vedas' Under the impact of such teachings, Indian scholars strongly defended Hinduism and it was often held that the Vedas represent its purest form—thus completely ignoring the fact that Hinduism was at best an umbrella term for the various strands of Indian religious thought, beliefs and practices prevalent in the Indian subcontinent. The Vedas were regarded as the repository of all knowledge and rational thought, and even as anticipating some modern scientific discoveries. Inevitably the myth of the Aryan race stirred the imagination of nationalist leaders as well as historians. Already the early Orientalists had established that Sanskrit and certain European languages had connected histories. Indian scholars now regarded the Indo-Aryans as originators of human civilization with India as its cradle. Inevitably they attempted to push back the antiquity of Indian culture. B.G. Tilak thus assigned the Vedic texts to the third millennium BC, while A.C. Das placed some of the Rigvedic hymns in the geological ages. Though the discovery of the Harappan civilization in 1923-4 proved the falsity of their assertions, the fantastic antiquity

given to the ancient Indian culture generally, and to the Vedas particularly, remains a favourite pastime of scholars even today. This does not apply to Rajendra Lal Mitra (1822–91), Ramakrishna Gopal Bhandarkar (1837–1925) and Vishwanath Kashinath Rajwade (1869–1926) who generally adopted a rational attitude to the past. Mitra published a tract to show irrefutably that in ancient times beef-eating was not a taboo. Bhandarkar, being a social reformer, supported widow remarriage and castigated the evils of the caste system and child marriage on the basis of his study of the ancient Indian texts, and made significant contributions to the reconstruction of the political and religious history of early India. V.K. Rajwade's insightful study in Marathi of the evolution of the institution of marriage is a classic. He is also remembered for collecting a large number of Sanskrit manuscripts and sources of Maratha history, later published in twenty-two volumes.

Initially inspired by the ideas of social reform, Indian historical scholarship gradually became overtly anti-imperialist. With the radicalization of Indian politics after the partition of Bengal in 1905 and the simultaneous growth of militant nationalism, Indian historical writings were conditioned and influenced by contemporary political developments which sharpened the edge of the freedom struggle. Partly in reaction to the imperialist view of India's past and partly as a step towards the building up of national self-respect, Indian historians made zealous efforts to refurbish the image of India's past. Hindu culture was looked upon as the precursor of other Asian cultures; this buttressed the theory of pan-Hinduism. The ancient period of Indian history, equated with the Hindu period in James Mill's scheme of periodization, was regarded as one of prosperity and general contentment. Social inequalities were glossed over and Indian society was portrayed as a model of social harmony and peace. The age of the Guptas came in for special praise. It was considered the golden age of Indian history—an idea which continues to find importance in most textbooks.

As Indian demand for political rights and representative government grew in strength during the twenties, nationalist historians began to attribute to ancient Hindus the highest achievements in the field of political thought and practice. In doing so, they often made extravagant claims, especially after the discovery of Kautilya's *Arthashastra* in 1905

and its publication in 1909. Parallels were drawn between Kautilya's social and economic policies and the social legislation of Bismarck. Kautilya's views on social and economic management were interpreted as a combination of state-socialism and *laissez-faire*. The *mantriparishad* (council of ministers) mentioned in the *Arthashastra* was compared with the Privy Council of Britain, and Kautilyan kingship with its constitutional monarchy. Ancient Indian tribal oligarchies were equated with Athenian democracy. All this was intended to prove that Indians had long known the tradition of democratic government for which they were struggling against the British. Thus nationalist historians—K.P. Jayaswal being the foremost of them—provided an ideological weapon to the freedom movement. But their approach to the study of early Indian history and culture was no less unhistorical than that of the British historians. They culled isolated favourable references from original Sanskrit texts, and on their basis generalized about the entire ancient period. This was an implicit denial of the changing character of Indian society—an idea which Mill and other British scholars never tired of repeating and which found its way into Marx's unacceptable construct of the Asiatic Mode of Production and Oriental Despotism.

The glorification of ancient India by nationalist historians meant the glorification of what appeared to them as Hindu India. In a sense therefore their writings seem to have been linked with the revivalist ideas of Vivekananda, Dayanand and others. In the 1930s and 1940s this linkage became quite clear: nationalist historiography gave an impetus to the ideas of Savarkar, the high priest of Hindu revivalism. He created the concept of 'Hindutva' and 'Hindu Rashtra' and gave the dangerous slogan to 'Hinduize all politics and militarize Hindudom' Under his inspiration the fanatically communal and fascist organization Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) was founded by K.D. Hedgewar in 1925 at Nagpur. The pernicious role of the RSS in spreading the virus of communalism in the body politic of India can hardly be exaggerated. The assassination of Mahatma Gandhi by RSS-trained Godse on 30 January 1948 and the demolition of the Baburi Masjid at Ayodhya on 6 December 1992 are two important and unforgettable milestones in the unfolding of the backward-looking Hindu revivalist and fascist politics of contemporary India.

At the historiographical level Hindu revivalism meant the

acceptance of Mill's periodization that was based on the wrong premise that ancient Indian kings up to AD 1200 subscribed to the Hindu religion. That some of the major ruling dynasties like the Indo-Greeks, Shakas and Kushanas were not Hindu was ignored. Nor for that matter were even the Mauryas Hindu. In fact ancient Indians never described themselves as 'Hindu' First used by the Arabs and later by others, the term 'Hindu' stood for the inhabitants of al-Hind (India). Foreign to early Indian literature, this name passed into Indian nomenclature much later. Moreover, if the establishment of Muslim rule marks the beginning of medievalism, several contemporary West Asian countries as well as Pakistan will have to be placed in the medieval age.

In spite of all this, nationalist historians never made any serious attempt to evolve a scientific periodization of Indian history and continued to adhere to Mill's chronological scheme. They ignored the essentially composite character of Indian culture, and consciously supported the cause of Hindu chauvinism and provided grist to the reactionary Mill, thus paving the way for communal historiography and ruling out the possibility of a rational basis for periodization.

In the post-Independence period, alongside the Hindu chauvinist view of Indian past, there has been going on a debate on periodization. This has been possible primarily because, unlike their predecessors, recent scholars have paid greater attention to the study of social, economic and cultural processes and have tried to recognize the linkage between these factors and political developments. This shift from the traditional political-dynastic history to non-political history is basically linked with a critical reappraisal of the primary sources. For example, the earlier tendency to use such categories as the 'Buddhist India', the 'Epic age' and the 'Sangam age' began to be challenged. For neither the Buddhist texts nor the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* belong to a specific period; they in fact contain several chronological strata—a fact which is also true of the Sangam literature, the earliest corpus of texts in the Tamil language. By paying due attention to the stratification of ancient Indian literary material (though inhibited by its predominantly religious character) and interpreting it in conjunction with archaeological and anthropological evidence, it has been possible to identify the elements of change and continuity in early Indian society, economy and culture. Researches in this direction have generated a lively debate which has been going on

among historians. Some of them, however, see too much red in all this especially after the 'crisis' and 'collapse' of Communism and the consequent 'setback' to Marxism, and tend to strengthen the views of neo-colonialist historians who argue subtly that early Indian society was stagnant, with political authority always too dispersed to be perceived as state.

The need to identify the major turning points in the life of the people which could form the basis for periodizing early Indian history was suggested by Damodar Dharmanand Kosambi in *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History* (1957) and the *Culture and Civilization of Ancient India in Historical Outline* (1965), which, despite severe criticism of their author's Marxist predilections, have achieved the status of classics. In Kosambi's view, the history of society, economy and culture was an integral part of the development of the forces and relations of production which can provide a rational basis for periodization. There seems to have emerged a consensus, at least for the time being, in favour of this view. It is therefore possible to argue that medievalism did not coincide with the advent of Islam but that it was the end of Gupta rule towards the end of the sixth century AD which marks the beginning of some significant developments in India. There arose several feudal principalities after the decline of the Guptas. The post-Gupta period saw a marked decrease in the volume of trade leading to the growth of a relatively closed village economy, thus providing a suitable background for the emergence of serfdom and a feudal agrarian set up. The birth of small principalities with inadequate inter-zonal communication on account of languishing trade provided the context for the growth of regional cultural units in what is now Andhra, Assam, Bengal, Gujarat, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Orissa and Rajasthan. This may also have given a fillip to the growth of regional languages, and regional idioms in art and architecture. Religious rituals and practices underwent considerable change. *Bhakti* (devotion), which reflected the complete dependence of the serfs or tenants on the landowners in the context of Indian feudal society, became an essential ingredient of religion. Most of these developments had their origin in Gupta times, but were to become prominent thereafter. The end of the sixth century and the beginning of the seventh may therefore be treated as the watershed between the ancient and medieval period.

This book presents a survey of the main developments in Indian

history until the emergence of feudalism. Dynastic history, not being our primary concern, is discussed in broadest outline. The rise and fall of empires have been explained with reference to their material basis. An attempt has been made to avoid the pitfalls of nationalist-chauvinist historiography; and the myths created by it during our freedom struggle have been re-examined. In an endeavour to integrate the results of recent historical research into the present study I have tried to look for a meaningful pattern, often re-interpreting the already known facts. In looking around the ancient Indian landscape I have given special attention to elements of change and of continuity in society and economy, to social tensions, mechanisms of exploitation, and the social role of religion and superstition.

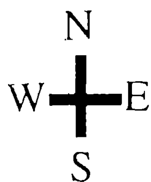
CHAPTER 2

From Prehistory to the Harappan Civilization

WHEN DID MAN begin to live in India? The answer is suggested by a large number of primitive stone tools found in different parts of the country, from Kashmir to Tamilnadu. The antiquity of these tools and their makers goes back more than two million years ago, to what is known as the Pleistocene period. We have some information about the Old Stone (Palaeolithic) Age. The people lived in very small nomadic communities. They used tools and implements of stone, roughly dressed by chipping, found throughout the country except the alluvial plains of the Indus, Ganga and Yamuna rivers. Such tools were used for hunting, cutting and other purposes. People wore animal skin, bark or leaves as protection from weather; and had no knowledge of cultivation and house building. In course of time came the ability to control fire and tame animals. In India as elsewhere in the world, man thus lived for millennia in the hunting and food-gathering stage, though his tools give evidence of gradual evolution culminating in what is called the Mesolithic phase, marked by the important practice of domesticating animals. Palaeolithic and Mesolithic people practised painting, of which evidence comes from several sites. Bhimbetka, 45 km south of Bhopal in Madhya Pradesh, the most striking of them, gives ample evidence of rock paintings extending from the Palaeolithic to the Mesolithic periods. Sites like Bhimbetka, Azamgarh, Pratapgarh and Mirzapur provide unquestionable testimony for the Mesolithic art which provides evidence of hunting, food-gathering, fishing and other human activities like sexual union, child birth and burial and thus gives a good idea of social, economic and other activities of the people. The social organization in the Mesolithic period tended to become more stable than in the preceding Palaeolithic period and ecological and material conditions largely shaped the religious beliefs of the people.

Human communities entered a new stage of development, known as the Neolithic Age, during which they became less dependent on hunting and food-gathering and began to produce their own food. Although the beginning of the New Stone Age is assigned to 9000 BC in the world context, in South Asia the earliest Neolithic settlement is at Mehrgarh (Baluchistan, a province of Pakistan), dated to around 7000 BC. Some Neolithic settlements on the northern spurs of the Vindhyan range may be as old as 5000 BC but those in south India may not be older than 2500 BC; some in southern and eastern India may be as late as 1000 BC. Neolithic people used tools and implements of polished stone; stone axes seem to have been quite popular as is evident from large numbers of them found in the hilly tracts of the country. Since people were dependent solely on stone tools and implements, their settlements could not extend beyond the hill areas and they could not produce more than what was needed for their subsistence. But they were able to cultivate some important crops like rice, wheat and barley. This, combined with domestication of animals, brought about a major change in subsistence strategies.

Towards the end of the Neolithic period, a significant development seems to have taken place—that of the use of metal. The first metal to be used was copper, and archaeologists have discovered several Chalcolithic cultures, based as they were on the use of stone and copper implements. Unlike the bronze-using Harappans, whom we will discuss in the sequel, Chalcolithic groups were primarily rural farming communities living in different parts of the country. Evidence of their settlements has come from many places. The important ones are Ahar, Gilund and Balathal in Rajasthan, Kayatha and Eran in western Madhya Pradesh, Jorwe, Nevasa, Daimabad, Chandoli, Songaon, Inamgaon, Prakash and Nasik in western Maharashtra, Narhan in eastern Uttar Pradesh, Pandu Rajar Dhibi and Mahishdal in West Bengal. In southern India also, many sites in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka have yielded a Chalcolithic horizon. In addition to the material found at these sites, more than forty hoards of copper objects like rings, celts, hatchets, swords, harpoons, spearheads and anthropomorphs have been found in a wide area ranging from West Bengal and Orissa in the east to Haryana and Gujarat in the west, from Andhra Pradesh in the south to Uttar Pradesh in the north. The largest of these hoards, consisting of 424 objects, comes from Gungeria



EXTENT OF THE HARAPPA CULTURE

SHORTUGHAI
(c. 320KM.)

Islamabad

A F G H N I S T A N

MUSA KHEL
RANA GUNDAI
NAUSHAHRO
HARAPPA
RUPAR
BANWALI
RAKHIGARHI
KALIBANGAN
ALAMGIRPUR
Delhi
Indus R.
Dry bed of Ghaggar R.
Ganga R.
Jamuna R.

P A K I S T A N

NAL
MEHI
SUKKUR
MOHENJO-DARO
KOT-DIJI
JHUKAR
KULLI
NINDOWARI
AMRI
CHANU-DARO
SUTKAGENDOR

I N D I A

Luni R.
BALAKOT
Karachi
DESALPUR
SURKOTADA
LOTHAL
RANGPUR
MEGHAM
Narmada R.
Tapi R.
BHAGATRAV

INDEX

HARAPPAN SITES ●

MODERN TOWNS O

NATIONAL BOUNDARY

SCALE

300 miles

500 km.

in Madhya Pradesh. On the basis of the association of the copper hoards with a ceramic type called the Ochre Coloured Pottery, archaeologists have placed them between 2000 and 1500 BC.

The range of artisanal activity of the Chalcolithic people seems to have been fairly wide. They were expert copper smiths and good workers in stone, and manufactured cloth and made beads of semi-precious stones. At some places, as at Inamgaon (Maharashtra), we find potters, smiths, ivory carvers, lime makers and terracotta makers. The villagers domesticated animals such as cows, sheep, goats and pigs, and hunted deer. The use of the camel as a draught animal was also known. They ate beef, though there is no strong evidence of their eating pork. They cultivated wheat, rice and *bajra* as also several pulses such as lentil (*masur*), black gram and grass pea. Spread as they were over a wide area, regional variations among the Chalcolithic communities were inevitable. They produced rice in eastern India which, together with fish, remains a staple food there even today. In western India were cultivated barley and wheat and in the lower Deccan, *ragi, bajra* and several millets. According to the archaeological evidence from Maharashtra the people buried their dead under the floor of their house in a north-to-south position along with pots and copper objects. Grave goods indicate the beginnings of social inequalities, and the striking difference in the size of settlements implies that the larger communities dominated over the smaller ones. On the basis of the finds of terracotta and unbaked nude clay figures of women, it has been postulated that the worship of the mother goddess was prevalent.

The Chalcolithic settlements of India are spread over a long chronological span ranging from the early third millennium BC to the eighth century BC. Some of them are certainly pre-Harappan, while others are contemporaries of the Harappan culture and still others are post-Harappan. The contact between the technologically advanced Harappans and Chalcolithic groups may not be ruled out altogether, but the latter could not acquire the traits of a civilization on account of their inherent limitations. Though they were good at working in copper, they did not know the art of mixing tin with copper to forge the much stronger metal called bronze which paved the way for the rise of the earliest civilization in Crete, Egypt, Mesopotamia and the Indus valley. The people of the Chalcolithic

age did not know the art of writing; nor did they live in cities. These elements of civilization, however, appeared for the first time in the Indus region.

The Indus or Harappa culture originated in the north-western part of the Indian subcontinent and seems to have covered an area larger than those of the contemporary civilizations of Egypt and Mesopotamia. Discovered in 1921, this culture was spread over parts of Panjab, Haryana, Sindh, Baluchistan, Gujarat, Rajasthan and western parts of Uttar Pradesh, and coexisted with communities which thrived on hunting-gathering or pastoral nomadism. Nearly a thousand Harappan sites scattered over this vast area have so far been explored or excavated, though a very limited number of them belong to the developed phase of the civilization and only half a dozen can be described as cities. Of these, Harappa on the bank of the Ravi in the Montgomery district (western Panjab), was the first to be excavated, whence the name Harappan is derived. Covering a circuit of a little less than 5 km, the site has yielded a large variety of objects in the course of excavations and is one of the two most important Harappan cities; the other is Mohenjodaro, in the Larkana district on the river Indus, the largest Harappan settlement. The third important Harappan site is Chanhudaro, about 130 km south of Mohenjodaro in Sindh. Lothal in Gujarat situated at the head of the Gulf of Cambay, Kalibangan in the dry bed of the river Ghaggar in northern Rajasthan and Banawali (Hissar district) in Haryana are the most important sites giving evidence of the flourishing phase of the Harappan civilization in India. Other sites include the coastal cities of Surkotada in Gujarat and Sutkagendor near the Makran coast, close to the Pakistan-Iran border. Rangpur and Rojdi in the Kathiawar peninsula in Gujarat represented the later phase of Harappan civilization. Despite the fact that a large number of sites associated with it have been discovered since 1946, the culture itself is still best known by the two cities, Mohenjodaro and Harappa. Both situated now in Pakistan, the Hindu revivalists are busy locating the epicentre of this culture in the elusive Saraswati valley.

The general layout of the two cities seems to have been similar. To the west of each was a citadel, fortified by crenellated walls. On this were erected the public buildings. At Harappa the citadel was a parallelogram, 420 m in length from north to south and 196 m from

east to west; it was 13.7-15.2 m high. At Mohenjodaro it rose to a height of 6 m in the south and to 12 m in the north. At both the places the citadel was based on a mound, which may have been deliberately constructed for the purpose. The enclosed citadel area may have been used for religious and governmental purposes. Below the citadel was the town proper, extending no less than a square mile, at both the sites. The main streets, some more than 9 m wide, were laid out on a grid plan. They were quite straight and intersected each other at right angles, thus dividing the city into large rectangular blocks. This kind of alignment of streets indicates conscious town planning and was not known in Mesopotamia or Egypt. The streets and buildings were provided with drains made of burnt bricks at Mohenjodaro and Harappa as well as at several other Indus sites, though at Kalibangan mud bricks were used for building purposes. The houses were equipped with rubbish-bins and bathrooms, and occasionally with a privy on the ground or upper floor. The bathrooms were connected by drains with sewers under the main streets. The drains were covered either with bricks or stone slabs. The drainage system is one of the most impressive achievements of the Harappans and presupposes the existence of some kind of municipal organization.

Stone buildings are conspicuous by their absence at the Harappan sites. Baked as well as unbaked bricks were the usual building material, though we have evidence of the use of mud bricks at several places such as Kalibangan. The houses of varying sizes, often of two or

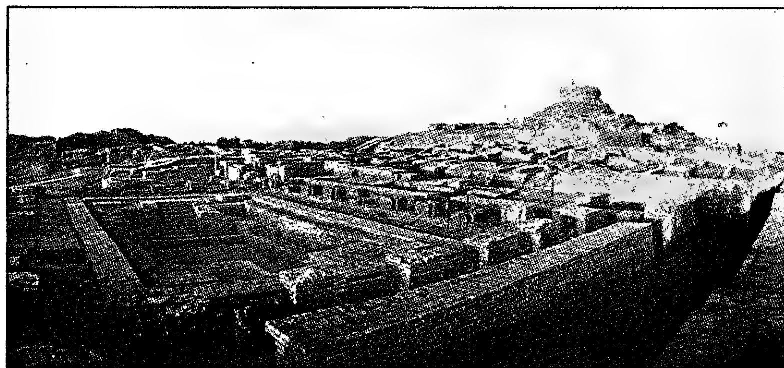


Plate 1: View of site showing Great Bath. Mohenjodaro, Pakistan, Harappa period.

more storeys, consisted of rooms constructed round a rectangular courtyard. The large houses were meant for the rich and had much the same plan—a rectangular courtyard surrounded, in some cases, by a maximum of twelve rooms. The parallel rows of two-room cottages unearthed at Mohenjodaro and Harappa were perhaps used by the poorer sections of society and anticipated the 'coolie' lines of modern Indian towns. From this may be inferred class differences in Harappan society.

In Harappa, Mohenjodaro and Kalibangan, the citadel area contained monumental structures which stood on a high mud brick platform. Of the large buildings that have been so far discovered, the Great Bath in the citadel at Mohenjodaro is the most striking. A specimen of beautiful brickwork, it is a rectangular tank and measures 11.88 x 7.01 m and 2.43 m deep. At the north and south ends of the Great Bath brick steps led to the bottom of the tank, which could be emptied by a drain. The Bath, it has been suggested, was meant for ritual bathing

In Mohenjodaro the largest building is a granary, 45.71 m long and 15.23 m wide, though its identification has been challenged. The 'Great Granary' is among the well-known buildings at Harappa and consisted of a series of brick platforms on which stood two rows of six granaries. Circular brick platforms to their south were meant for threshing grain. At Kalibangan also have been found brick platforms; these may have been used for granaries which constituted an important feature of Harappan cities. Several Harappan sites share some of their features. Chanhudaro lacks the citadel, but like these urban centres, it has produced evidence of the use of drains and baked brick houses. At Lothal (in Gujarat), 720 km south-east of Mohenjodaro, has been revealed a great artificial platform with streets and houses of regular plan. In addition to the urban settlement, some archaeologists claim, a brick dockyard connected with the Gulf of Cambay by a channel has also been discovered here. Sutkagen-Dor, 48 km from the Arabian Sea on the Makran coast, consisted of a formidable citadel and a lower fortified settlement and may have been a sea-port for trading. The Harappan towns situated along the sea coast include Sotka Koh (near Pasni in Pakistan) and Balakot (72 km north-west of Karachi, lying at a distance of 13 and 19 km respectively from the Arabian Sea). The coastal settlements served as ports and participated in regular

maritime trade with West Asia. Town planning in most of these places seems to have been marked by a striking uniformity; this can also be said of structures.

On the basis of the general uniformity in town planning, it has been postulated that the Harappan people had a developed state organization and that Mohenjodaro was the capital of their extensive empire with Harappa and Kalibangan as its 'subsidiary' centres. The possibility that the priests may have ruled in Harappa is precluded by the fact that no religious structures except the Great Bath have been found at any Harappan site; this is in contrast to the cities of Lower Mesopotamia where definite evidence of the priestly political authority is available. The prevalence of a fire cult at Lothal appears probable in the later phase, but there is nothing to indicate the use of temples. Harappan trade contacts with Western Asia may indicate their greater concern for commerce than for conquest. But this can hardly support the view that a class of merchants ruled at Harappa. In fact, any idea of the political organization of the Harappans will remain highly speculative till their script is deciphered.

The earliest specimen of Harappan script was noticed in 1853 and the complete script was recovered by 1923 from a large number of inscriptions written generally from right to left on a wide range of objects. The most common form of writing is on the intaglio seals, made mostly of carved and fired steatite, presumably used by the propertied people to mark and identify their property. More than 2000 seals have been found at Harappan settlements and there have been more than fifty bold claims to decipherment of the Harappan script. Some scholars try to connect the script with Dravidian or proto-Dravidian languages, others with Sanskrit, and still others with the Sumerian language. None of these readings can, however, inspire confidence.

As a result of several decades of digging at various places in India and Pakistan, however, now there is an impressive amount of material relating to the life of Harappans. Our knowledge of their food habits and subsistence strategies is based on botanical and faunal studies, motifs of plants and animals on painted pottery, figurines, and portrayals on seals. Judging by the environmental diversity, it appears that the Harappans could not have adopted a uniform subsistence pattern. The diversity in subsistence activities is often seen as an important

adaptive strategy to support urban centres. Together with hunting and gathering they practised agriculture on a considerable scale and produced, in addition to peas, two types of wheat and barley. A good quantity of barley has been discovered at Banawali in Haryana. They also produced sesamum and mustard which were used for oil. Evidence of rice cultivation is not available from places like Mohenjodaro and Harappa. But at Lothal and Rangpur (near Ahmedabad) people used rice as early as 1800 BC. Dates and field peas were also grown and formed items of Harappan diet. A fragment of cotton cloth found at Mohenjodaro proves beyond doubt that the Harappans grew cotton.

The Harappan cultural zone fell in a comparatively low rainfall area, and it is likely that irrigation was necessary for cultivation. But it is doubtful that the Harappans practised canal irrigation. Most agricultural land in the alluvial plains seems to have been watered by flood, though some archaeologists argue for the existence of irrigation canals of the Harappan period. According to some of them, the massive tank at Lothal, identified by its excavator with a dockyard, may have been a reservoir filled by river floodwaters. In any case it is probable that the Harappans were familiar with several methods to control water for agriculture. Whether or not they used a plough has sometimes been controversial. No hoe or ploughshare has been found, but the evidence of a furrowed field in Kalibangan indicates that the Harappans used a wooden ploughshare. Who drew the plough—men or oxen or some other animals—is not known.

No less important than agriculture was animal husbandry which played an important role in the Harappan subsistence system. The people were familiar with a range of animals. A majority of Harappan terracottas represent cattle; the cow was not represented. Besides sheep and goats, dogs, cats, humped cattle, water buffalo and elephants were certainly domesticated. Asses and camels were used as beasts of burden. Finds of bones of a large number of wild animals from various settlements indicate that the people were acquainted with deer, rhinoceros and tortoise, though the horse seems to have been unknown to them. The animals mentioned above required different kinds of environment for their survival and the familiarity of Harappans with them is also an indication of the latter's ability to adapt themselves to a variety of living conditions. This explains the diversification of the Harappan subsistence economy which, in spite of its being

somewhat archaic, produced enough surplus to support the urban population.

Although they continued to make tools of stone the Harappans lived in the Bronze Age. They manufactured bronze by mixing tin with copper. Tin was possibly brought from Afghanistan though Hazaribag in Bihar may have been another source of its supply. Copper was brought from the Khetri copper mines of Rajasthan, but it could have also come from Baluchistan. Both metals, however, were difficult to obtain. Bronze tools were therefore not prolific at Harappan sites. Their tool types comprised flat axes, chisels, knives, spearheads and arrowheads of copper and bronze. Various techniques of working in copper were known, such as hammering, lapping and casting. Brick kilns, associated with copper working, have been discovered at various places. Working in bronze, however, was not very common and bronzesmiths therefore may have been an important social group. The authors of the Harappan culture possessed the knowledge of gold. Beads, pendants, armlets, brooches, needles and other personal ornaments were often made of gold, though the use of silver was perhaps more common.

Besides metal working, the Harappans practised numerous other arts and crafts. Seal-cutting occupied a place of importance. The Harappan seals form a class by themselves and seem to have been linked with trading activities. No less important was the bead-maker's craft. At Chanhudaro and Lothal bead-makers' shops have been discovered. Beads of gold, silver, copper, faience, steatite, semi-precious stones, shells and pottery have been found in abundance. The long barrel beads of carnelian rank among the finest technical achievements of the Harappans. Evidence of textile manufacture has come from Mohenjodaro which has yielded a piece of woven cloth. Spindle whorls were used for spinning and cloth of wool and cotton were woven. Judging by the surviving massive brick structures at the Harappan settlements, brick manufacturing and masonry appear to have been important crafts. The Harappans also made boats. The potter's craft was fairly well-developed; and the potters were quite a visible artisanal group. Wheel-turned and mass produced, most Harappan pottery represents a blending of the ceramic traditions of the north-west and those of the cultures to the east of the Indus. Most Harappan pottery is plain and may have been meant for local

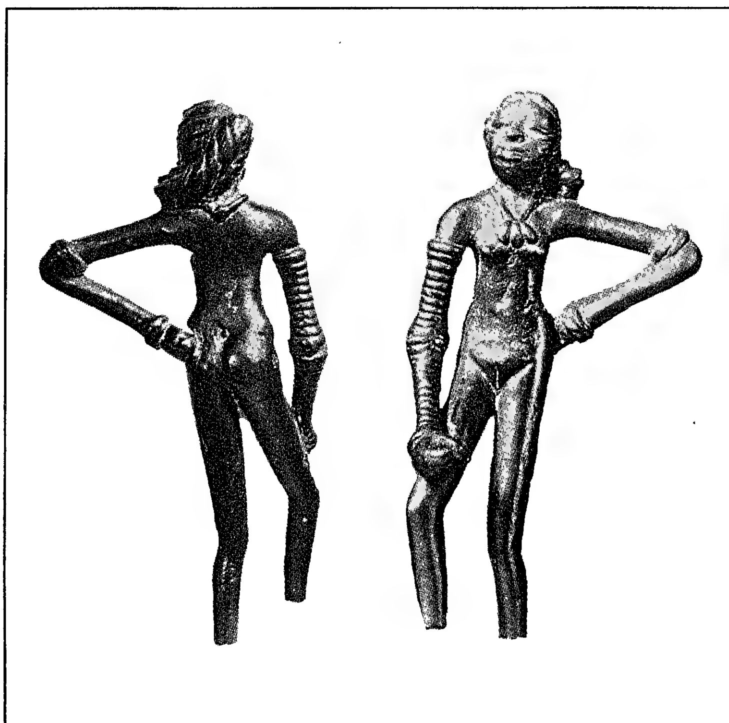


Plate 2: Female figure, front and back views. From Mohenjodaro, Pakistan, Mature Harappa period, *c.* 2100–1750 BC. Bronze. Ht: 11.5 cm. National Museum, New Delhi.

use. But a substantial part of it, treated with red slip and black painted decoration, may have been prestige items meant for long distance trade.

Harappan craft production included some works of art. The most striking of them is a bronze statuette of a pert and provocative 'dancing girl', naked but for a necklace and a large number of bangles covering one arm. The figurines of a buffalo and a ram and the two little toy carts are also well known bronze pieces of Harappan art. A few stone sculptures have also been found. Of them the bearded head (presumably of a priest) from Mohenjodaro has much artistic value; this is also true of the two small male torsos discovered in Harappa. The use of bronze or stone for artistic creation seems to have been extremely limited. Terracottas, in contrast, have been found

in great number indicating their universal popularity either as toys or cult objects.

A people with numerous arts and crafts, the Harappans engaged in commodity production for which they obtained raw material from outside. Gold may have been imported from south India, especially Mysore, where it was in good supply in antiquity and is still mined. Afghanistan and Iran were other likely sources of this metal. Silver was imported probably from Afghanistan and Iran. Copper may have been brought from south India and from Baluchistan and Arabia, though within the Harappan zone itself, Rajasthan was an important source of its supply. Lapis lazuli is rare in Harappan archaeological material, and came from Badakshan in north-east Afghanistan; turquoise from Iran, amethyst from Maharashtra; agate, chalcedonies and carnelian from Saurashtra and western India. Alabaster was possibly brought from several places both to the east and the west. Jade came from Central Asia.

The Harappan trade links extended to the cities of Mesopotamia where some two dozen Harappan seals have been found in cities like Susa, Ur, Nippur, Kish, etc. Some ancient sites in the Persian Gulf region (e.g. Failaka and Bahrain) have also yielded seals of Harappan origin. From the Indus region only three cylinder seals and a few metal objects from Mesopotamia have been found. The archaeological evidence of trade with West Asia is not very impressive; and the general absence of Mesopotamian trade items at Harappan sites is striking. How far this was due to the fact that Mesopotamia exported only perishable goods to the Indus zone is a matter of speculation. But the Mesopotamian literature speaks of merchants of Ur carrying on trade with foreign countries. Sargon of Akkad (2350 BC) is said to have taken pride in the fact that the ships of Dilmun, Magan and Meluha passed through his capital. Dilmun is commonly identified with the island of Bahrain in the Persian Gulf, and Magan may be the Makran coast. Meluha is generally understood to mean India, especially the Indus region and Saurashtra. Whatever the volume of trade, numerous representations of ships and boats on Harappan seals and a terracotta model of a ship from Lothal give us some idea of the mode of riverine and maritime transport. Bullock-carts may have played a crucial role in inland transport. Trade and exchange activities were regulated by a developed system of weights and measures.

Numerous articles of chert, limestone, steatite, etc., were used as weights based on 16 or its multiples. The provenance of sticks inscribed with measure marks is a testimony to the fact that the Harappans knew the art of measurement. The prevalence of a uniform system of weights and measures in even the far flung Harappan sites suggests that there was a central authority to regulate exchange activities.

Some idea of the Harappan religious beliefs and practices may be formed on the basis of seal and terracotta figurines. Numerous nude female figurines in terracotta are believed to represent a popular fertility goddess. Some Vedic texts show reverence to a female goddess but it was only after centuries of hibernation that she surfaced as the supreme goddess during the early medieval period. The male deity of the Harappan people was the horned god depicted on the seals, nude but for many bangles, necklaces and a peculiar head-dress consisting of a pair of horns. On one of these seals he is surrounded by four wild animals—an elephant, a tiger, a rhinoceros and a buffalo; beneath his seat are two deer. He apparently shared many of the traits of the later Indian Shiva who appears bizarre, eccentric and terrifying in his numerous portrayals found in the classical Sanskrit poetry. Numerous symbols of the phallus and female sex organs made of stone found in Harappa indicate the prevalence of phallus worship—a practice which, despite its condemnation in the *Rigveda* as being prevalent among the non-Aryans, became a respectable form of worship in later times; in fact clay phalli continue to be worshipped and then dumped every morning in some parts of the country even today. In the Indus cultural zone trees were also worshipped; the *pipal* tree, depicted on several seals, was the object of special veneration as is the case in our own times. The same is true of animals like the humped bull, which is considered sacred to this day. However, it remains doubtful that Harappan divinities were placed in temples as was common in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia. The Harappan religion may have anticipated some features of later Indian religion. But to trace contemporary Indian religious practices to Harappan times often ignores the elements of change that crept into them from time to time. For example, the discovery of many graves in Harappa and other places proves beyond doubt that the Harappans buried their dead, in north-south orientation, along with different types of goods. This practice is in sharp contrast to the subsequent practice of cremation. It is a different

matter that if a communalist Hindu is told that all his ancestors did not practise cremation may well jump down our throat!

There seems to be a consensus among scholars that by about the beginning of the second millennium BC the urban phase of the Harappan culture came to an end, though signs of its decay are noticeable even earlier when cities like Harappa, Mohenjodaro and Kalibangan began to experience decline in urban planning and structural activity, and tended to become slums. The Great Bath and the granary at Mohenjodaro fell into disuse. The city, archaeologists tell us, shrank to a small settlement of 3 hectares from the original 85 hectares. Decline is also evident at Harappa, Kalibangan and Chanhudaro and at most of the settlements. The disappearance of systematic urban planning and building activity was accompanied by almost sudden vanishing of the Harappan script, weights and measures, bronze tools and the red ware pottery with black designs. The Harappan cities seem to have been finally deserted by 1800 BC; around this time Meluha (identified with India) ceases to be visible in the Mesopotamian records. The population of Harappan urban centres either perished or moved away to other areas. Not surprisingly traits of the post-urban Harappan culture are found at many places in Pakistan, in central and western India, in Panjab, Rajasthan, Haryana, Jammu, Kashmir, Delhi and western Uttar Pradesh during 2000–1500 BC, which witnessed the spread of non-Harappan Chalcolithic settlements of early farming communities in different parts of the country. It is likely that some of them were direct descendants of the late Harappan culture.

The progressive degeneration and final collapse of the Harappan civilization has been attributed to several factors. It is generally held that calamitous alterations in the course of the Indus and the Ravi rivers led to the desiccation of the countryside which ceased to produce food for the urban centres. This made the major Harappan cities weak under the pressure of population which was forced to migrate. Excavations reveal that Mohenjodaro itself was flooded more than once; traces of several phases of catastrophic flooding have been detected here. Chanhudaro was also twice destroyed by massive inundations. The floods perhaps derived from violent geomorphological changes in the lower Indus region, leading, in turn, to the economic decline of the Harappan settlements. Evidence has been

adduced to show that by the middle of the second millennium BC there was an increase in the arid conditions in the Harappan cultural zone thus drying up the river Ghaggar-Hakra in one of its core regions with disastrous consequences for rural and urban economies. But a major blow to the Harappan civilization, according to a dominant view, was given by a group of 'barbarians' who began to migrate into India a little before the middle of the second millennium BC. At several places in north Baluchistan thick layers of burning have been taken to imply the violent destruction of whole settlements by fire. Half a dozen groups of human skeletons belonging to the later phase of occupation at Mohenjodaro may also indicate that the city was invaded. A group of huddled skeletons in one of the houses and the skeleton of a woman lying on the steps of a well may suggest that some of the inhabitants were captured and done to death by marauders. Indirect evidence of the displacement of Harappans by peoples from the west is available from several places. To the south-west of the citadel at Harappa, for example, a cemetery, known as Cemetery H, has come to light. It is believed to have belonged to an alien people who destroyed the older Harappa. At Chanhudaro also evidence of the superimposition of barbarian life is available.

Interestingly, even the *Rigveda*, the earliest text of the Aryans, contains references to the destruction of cities of the non-Aryans. It speaks of a battle at a place named Hariyupiya which has been identified with Harappa—an identification questioned by several scholars All this may imply that the 'invaders' were the horse riding barbarians of the Indo-Aryan linguistic stock who may have come from Iran through the hills. But neither the archaeological nor the linguistic evidence proves convincingly that there was a mass-scale confrontation between the Harappans and the Aryans who came to India, most probably, in several waves.

CHAPTER 3

The Aryans and the Vedic Life

THE VALIDITY OF the idea of the Aryan invasion of the urban centres of the Harappan people leading to the final disappearance of their culture has been enmeshed in controversy, though it has been put to various uses by different groups of scholars and social and political activists. The invasion theory was first clearly expounded by an eminent British archaeologist who trained most of the first generation post-Independence professional Indian archaeologists, and remained more or less unchallenged in his lifetime. But during the last twenty-five years, especially after his death, it has come in for much criticism. Some archaeologists—Indians in particular—have criticized the theory with a vengeance as it were, though in the Western academic circles the theory continues to occupy an important place. Both the critics and the defenders of the Aryan invasion(s) thesis have used all weapons in their armoury to support their view. But their efforts have often been informed by political considerations.

Both in India and Europe, the Aryans have been thought of as a race in the genetic sense and have been credited with many cultural achievements. In India socio-economic reformers led by Dayanand Saraswati, who founded the Arya Samaj in 1875, laid stress on Aryan culture as the root of all Indian tradition and sought the sanction of the Vedas, the earliest extant Aryan literature, for their ideas. Some scholars continue to believe in pan-Aryanism and go so far as to claim that India was the cradle of world culture. Blind racial prejudice has led them to believe and propagate that every peak of Indian cultural achievement must be Aryan; accordingly the authors of even the Harappan culture have been taken to be the Aryans. This idea has always betrayed a strong upper caste Hindu bias, because the Aryans did not include the shudras and untouchables. The bias is glaringly evident in the activities of Hindu communal and revivalist organizations in recent years. But from the nineteenth century itself when Dayanand's

Arya Samaj came into being, there has been a sharp reaction to the upper caste orientation of the theory of Aryan race. A contemporary of Dayanand and a leader of the non-brahmana movements in Maharashtra during the Peshwa rule who founded the Satya Shodhak Samaj in 1873, Jyotiba Phule exploited the theory in a radical manner. He regarded the Aryans as aliens subjugating the indigenous people described in the brahmanical texts as Dasas and shudras, the real inheritors of the land. The ideas of Phule gave ideological support to non-brahamana movements in other parts of the country and played a progressive role in his times, though in contemporary India these may have been used, consciously or unconsciously, to justify frequent caste confrontations. In European countries, as in India, the Aryan concept has played a significant role since the nineteenth century when the Romantic movement in literature and racist ideas derived much inspiration from it. The culmination of racism took place under the German Nazi regime which gave a hideous racial implication to the term 'Aryan' and to its official philosophy which sanctioned the cruellest genocide in history. Although unfortunately, the concept, central to the pre-World War II fascisms, is being revived by a large number of racial hate groups mushrooming in different parts of the world even in our own times, in academic circles the whole concept of race based on skeletal measurements and colour (of the hair, skin and eyes) is now regarded as invalid. In view of the research in the biological sciences, it is extremely difficult to think of any ethnic group as having retained its purity of blood for any length of time.

The existence of groups of people speaking closely related languages, called Indo-European/Indo-Aryan, cannot however be doubted. Sanskrit, Latin, Greek, Germanic (German, English, Swedish), Slav (Russian, Polish) and Romance (Italian, Spanish, French, Rumanian) languages belong to the Aryan family. On the basis of similarity between these languages, it has been postulated that the original Aryans had a common homeland somewhere in the steppes stretching from southern Russia to Central Asia. From this region the Aryan-speaking peoples may have migrated to different parts of Europe and Asia. One of their branches migrated to Iran where they lived for a long time. From the Iranian tableland they moved in the south-eastern direction towards India where they

encountered the city civilization of the Indus valley. The dispersal of the Aryans in India was not a single event. It took place in several stages, covering several centuries and involving many tribes. These tribes were often considerably different from each other but, at the same time, shared many cultural traits.

The chief source of information on the early history of the Aryans in India are the Vedas, perhaps the oldest literary remains of the Indo-European language group. The word 'Veda' means knowledge. There are four Vedas: *Rig, Yajur, Sama*, and *Atharva*. The *Rigveda* is a collection of 1028 hymns, mostly prayers to gods, for use at sacrifices. The *Yajurveda* contains sacrificial formulae in prose and verse to be recited by the priest who performed the manual part of the sacrifice. The *Samaveda* is a collection of verses from the *Rigveda* for liturgical purposes. The *Atharvaveda* consists mainly of magical spells and charms. Attached to each Veda are various explanatory prose manuals called Brahmanas, whose concluding portions are called the Aranyakas (forest books). Secret and dangerous owing to their magical power, the Aranyakas could be taught only in a forest. The Upanishads are commentaries appended to the Aranyakas, but of a more esoteric character.

Vedic literature has been traditionally held sacred for it is believed to have divine source. The Vedas, according to the popular Indian perception, are eternal (*nitya*). The various sages (*rishis*) who were their authors no more than received them from god. Transmitted orally from generation to generation, the Vedas were not committed to writing until very late. The Vedic texts may be divided into two broad chronological strata: the early Vedic (*c.* 1500-1000 BC) when most of the hymns of the *Rigveda* were composed; the later Vedic (*c.* 1000-600 BC) to which belong the remaining Vedas and their branches. The two periods correspond to two phases of Aryan expansion in India.

The geographical horizon of the Rigvedic hymns gives us an idea of initial Aryan settlement in the subcontinent. The earliest Aryans lived in eastern Afghanistan, Panjab and the fringes of western Uttar Pradesh. Though not adequately supported by the archaeological evidence, this is clearly borne out by the *Rigveda* which refers to the western tributaries of the Indus, the Gomati (modern Gomal), the Krumu (modern Kurram) and the Kubha (modern Kabul). The

Suvastu (Swat) is the most important river mentioned to the north of Kabul. The name implies 'fair dwellings' and may be evidence for Aryan settlements in the Swat valley. But the main focus of the Rigvedic culture seems to have been the Panjab and Delhi region. Here the most frequently mentioned rivers are the Sindhu (Indus), the Saraswati (now lost in the Rajasthan deserts and existing only in the imagination of the credulous as flowing underground up to Prayag or Allahabad and joining invisibly the Ganga and Yamuna there), the Drishadvati (Ghaggar) and the five streams which collectively gave their name to the Panjab (five waters): the Shutudri (Satlej), Vipas (Beas), Parushni (Ravi), Asikni (Chenab), and Vitasta (Jhelum). The geographical knowledge of the early Aryans does not seem to have extended beyond the Yamuna, which is mentioned in the *Rigveda*.

The early Aryan settlers were engaged in taking possession of the Land of the Seven Rivers (*saptasindhava*) represented by the Indus and its principal tributaries. This often led to conflict between various Aryan tribes. The most important of the tribal wars to which the *Rigveda* refers was the Battle of Ten Kings (*dasarajna*). Sudas, we are told, was the king of the Bharata tribe settled in the western Panjab. Vishvamitra was his chief priest, who had led him to victorious campaigns on the Vipas and the Shutudri. Later Sudas dismissed Vishvamitra and appointed Vasishtha, who possessed greater knowledge of the priestly lore. Vishvamitra, feeling slighted, formed a confederacy of ten tribes, five of whom were important and are frequently referred to in the *Rigveda* as *panchajanah* (five tribes). In the battle that followed on the banks of the Purushni, Sudas was victorious. It is likely that there took place other intertribal wars of this kind.

The chief opponents of the Aryans were however the indigenous inhabitants of non-Aryan origin. Many passages in the *Rigveda* show a general feeling of hostility towards the people known as Panis. Described as wealthy, they refused to patronize the Vedic priests or perform Vedic rituals, and stole cattle from the Aryans. More hated than the Panis were the Dasas and Dasyus. The Dasas have been equated with the tribal people called the Dahaes, mentioned in the ancient Iranian literature, and are sometimes considered a branch of the early Aryans. Divodasa, a chief of the Bharata clan, is said to have defeated the non-Aryan Sambara. The suffix *dasa* in the name of the

chief of the Bharata clan indicates his Aryan antecedents. In the *Rigveda* instances of the slaughter of the Dasyus (*dasyu-hatya*) outnumber references to conflicts with the Dasas, thus giving the impression that the Rigvedic Aryans were not as hostile to them. Dasyu corresponds to *dahyu* in the ancient Iranian language. It has therefore been suggested that conflicts between the Rigvedic tribes and the Dasyus were those between the two main branches of the Indo-Iranian/Indo-Aryan peoples who came to India in successive waves. The Dasas and Dasyus were most likely people who originally belonged to the Aryan speaking stock and in course of their migration into the subcontinent they acquired cultural traits very different from those of the Rigvedic people. Not surprisingly, the *Rigveda* describes them as 'black-skinned', 'malignant', and 'nonsacrificing' and speaking a language totally different from that of the Aryans.

In a sense the Aryan subjugation of the earlier inhabitants meant a reversal to a comparatively less advanced way of life. For the Harappans were culturally far more advanced than the Aryans who figure in the *Rigveda* as destroyers of towns, not their builders. The chief Aryan god Indra is described as the breaker of forts (*purandara*) and is said to have shattered ninety forts for his protégé Divodasa. We are told that he 'rends forts as age consumes a garment' The *Rigveda* speaks of several ruined cities and associates them with earlier inhabitants of the area, presumably the Harappans.

As might be expected of a people without cities, the early Aryans did not have an advanced technology even though their use of horses and chariots, and possibly of some better arms of bronze did give them an edge over their opponents. Their knowledge of metals seems to have been limited. The *Rigveda* mentions only one metal called *ayas* (copper/bronze). In view of the widespread use of bronze in Iran around the middle of the second millennium BC the word has been taken to mean bronze. Yet bronze objects assignable to the period of the *Rigveda* have not hitherto been found in any significant quantity at sites excavated in the Land of the Seven Rivers. The evidence for the use of bronze on any considerable scale being slight, there is no archaeological basis for the view that the early Aryan bronze-smiths were highly skilled or produced tools and weapons superior to those of the Harappans. Nor did the Rigvedic people possess any knowledge of iron.

The Aryans came to India as semi-nomadic people with a mixed pastoral and agricultural economy, in which cattle-rearing played a predominant role. Cattle formed their most valued possession and the chief form of their wealth; a wealthy person was called *gomat*. Prayers were made for the increase of cattle. The sacrificial priest was rewarded for his services with cattle, and the cow was the chief medium of exchange. Cattle were often the cause of inter-tribal wars. For, the word for battle came to be known as *gavishti*, literally, 'a search for cows' Several other terms for battle like *goshu, gavyat, gavyu* and *gaveshana* were also derived from cattle. The social impact of cattle-raising can be seen from the fact that those who lived with their cows in the same cowshed came to belong to the same *gotra*, which word later came to indicate descent from a common ancestor and hence an exogamous clan unit. The daughter was known as *duhitri*, milcher of the cow. The cow is described in one or two places as not to be killed (*aghnya*), but this may imply its economic importance. It was not yet held sacred; nor had it become a politicized animal till then. Both oxen and cows were therefore slaughtered for food. Beef was a delicacy offered to the guest, described as *goghna* (cow-killer). In addition to cows, goats and sheep were domesticated both for milk and meat. Not surprisingly a good quantity of charred bones of cattle and other animals has been found at several archaeological sites. Bhagwanpura and Dadheri in Haryana where the post-Harappan cultural horizons coincide with the early Vedic period are cases in point. Since cattle seem to have been tended by common herdsmen, it has been suggested that they were collectively owned by members of the tribe.

Cattle-breeding was the chief source of livelihood of the Rigvedic people. But they also practised agriculture. References to agricultural activities in the *Rigveda* are not many; the term *krishi* (to cultivate) occurs rarely in it. The well-known term *hala* for the plough is not found, but two other terms for plough, *langala* and *sira*, are mentioned. Ploughs were drawn by oxen; and ploughshares of wood were used for cultivation. The early Aryans possessed some knowledge of seasons, which promoted agriculture; the *Rigveda* mentions five seasons. Fire was used for burning forests and making land fit for cultivation. This was an easy option available because the people did not have knowledge of iron. Copper with which they were familiar was not

of much value for agricultural operations. References to ploughing, sowing, reaping, threshing and winnowing occur in the later portions of the *Rigveda*. The agrarian economy therefore may have become more stable towards the end of the early Vedic period. The Rigvedic people are known to have cultivated only one variety of grain called *yava* which meant barley. Unlike cattle, land was perhaps not commonly owned by members of a tribe. The *Rigveda* mentions several words for fields, and the practice of measuring land, but it nowhere refers to the sale, transfer, mortgage or gift of land by an individual. Obviously the concept of private property in land had not struck roots.

The early Aryans, who were essentially pastoral, did not develop any political structure which could measure up to a state in either the ancient or the modern sense. The Land of the Seven Rivers, the region of their initial expansion in the subcontinent, was held by small tribal principalities; five of them are mentioned as the *panchajanah* in the *Rigveda*. Kingship was the same as tribal chiefship, the term *rajan* being used for the tribal chief. Primarily a military leader, the chief of the tribe fought for cows and not territory. He ruled over his people (*jana*) and not over any specified area of land. He was therefore called their protector (*gopa janasya* or *gopati janasya*). The term *gopati*, basically indicating the protector of the herds of cattle, came to acquire the extended meaning of the protector of the people or tribe (*jana*). The word *jana* occurs twenty-seven times in the *Rigveda*, but *janapada* is not mentioned at all and the term *rajya* occurs only once. Yet the idea of territorial monarchy emerged towards the close of the Rigvedic period when the chief/king (*rajan*) came to be looked upon as an upholder of the *rashtra*. Entitled to booty from successful cattle raids or battles, the king could also receive gifts in kind. But his position was not beyond question. Very likely he owed his office to the choice of the people, though kingship was perhaps confined to certain families. Available evidence does not indicate the continuance of royal succession in one family for more than three generations. This suggests that the principle of hereditary succession from father to son was not yet established. The king's authority was substantially limited by tribal assemblies like the *sabha* and the *samiti*, which discharged judicial and political functions. The *sabha* was a council of the elder members of the tribe; perhaps

women also attended it. The *samiti* was a general tribal assembly and less exclusive than the *sabha*. Another tribal assembly, the *vidatha*, also may have restricted the power of the *rajan*, though its political role is not possible to determine precisely. His dependence on the priest, who was quite influential, perhaps further acted as a constraint on the chief.

The Rigvedic people did not possess an elaborate administrative apparatus which would have required adequate surplus production. The only surplus that was available was in the form of *bali*, mentioned in the *Rigveda* several times in the sense of tribute to a prince or offering to a god. Tribute paid to the chief was obligatory but there is no evidence to show that it was regular. A functionary called *senani* is referred to, but information about a regular standing army is lacking. Since cases of theft, burglary, cheating and cattle lifting were known in the Rigvedic period, the existence of police officials cannot altogether be ruled out, though we do not know much about them. About half a dozen state officials are mentioned in the *Rigveda*. They include the crowned queen known as the *mahishi* (the powerful one) and the charioteer; the latter was quite important because of the importance of the horse and chariots in the contemporary milieu. Certain rudiments of state had begun to appear but the political system on the whole was a tribal chieftainship, devoid of a firm territorial basis, the halo of a latter-day monarchy, the regular standing army and an elaborate officialdom.

Early Aryan social organization was essentially tribal, based on kinship. Two terms *jana* and *vish* repeatedly occur in the *Rigveda*. The *jana* comprised several *vish*; the former stood for the whole tribe and the latter for the clan. It is held that the *vish* was divided into *gramas*, but evidence for this is inadequate. The basic unit of Aryan tribal society was the patriarchal family called the *kula*. The eldest male member of the family was known as the *kulapa* (protector of the family). In the hymns desire is expressed for *praja*, including both boys and girls. But the people seem to have been keen on having brave sons (*suvirah*) who could fight their wars. In spite of the patriarchal character of the family, the position of women was much better in the Rigvedic period than in subsequent times. Girls normally married after puberty, as can be inferred from the frequent mention of unmarried ones such as Ghosha who grew up in the home of her parents. In some cases a woman could freely mix with young men

and have love affairs. She could take part in sacrifices with her husband though some unmarried women like Visvavara and Apala offered the sacrifice all by themselves. Some women are also said to have been authors of Rigvedic hymns. A childless widow could cohabit with her brother-in-law until the birth of a son; the practice was known as *niyoga*. The institution of marriage seems to have been established. But we have also some evidence of incestuous relationships during the Rigvedic period. The dialogue between Yama and Yami in the later portion of the *Rigveda* is indicative of brother-sister union. Attention has also been drawn to other examples of incest in this text—those between father and daughter, and mother and son. These instances may be treated as survivals of a matrilineal society. Clearly then the mother-right was not completely submerged by the father-right in this period, but the overall patriarchal social ambience cannot be ignored.

It is likely that the early Aryans had some consciousness of their distinctive physical appearance. They were generally fair, the indigenous people dark in complexion. The colour of the skin may have been an important mark of their identity. This provided the context for the use of the term '*varna*' (colour). Scholars of racist persuasion have blown this out of proportion to explain the emergence of the *varna* (caste) system. But the more important factor leading to the creation of social divisions was the conquest of the Dasas and Dasyus who were assigned the status of slaves and shudras. Tribal chiefs and priests who cornered a larger share of booty, acquired greater power and prestige at the cost of their common kinsmen, thus giving rise to social inequalities. The gift of slaves to priests was made frequently; most of them being female slaves could, however, be employed only for domestic purposes and not for agricultural production or other productive activities. But all members of even the priestly class were not fortunate enough to receive lavish gifts. No wonder then that the brahmana Vamadeva laments his grim poverty: 'In the utmost need cooked I the entrails of a dog; among the gods I found no protection; I beheld my wife in degradation. Another indigent brahmana humbly implores Agni 'to accept his sacrifice of worm-eaten firewood, as he has no cow, nor even an axe' We also hear of a brahmana who prays for the return of his wife forcibly abducted by the king.

In course of time the tribal society was divided into three groups,

warriors (*rajanya*/kshatriya), priests (brahmana) and the common people; the fourth division called the shudras appeared towards the end of the Rigvedic period, the term being derived from the name of one of the subjugated tribes. The fourfold social division into brahmana, kshatriya, vaishya and shudra was given religious sanction. A late passage in the earliest Veda tells us that the brahmana emanated from the mouth of the primeval man, the kshatriya from his arms, the vaishya from his thighs and the shudra from his feet. This may be a *post facto* rationalization of the occupations and of the position that the various groups came to occupy in the social hierarchy. But occupational differentiation did not always coincide with social divisions in the Rigvedic period. We come across a family consisting of a poet son, his father a physician and mother a grinder of corn.

Unequal distribution of the spoils of war was certainly the basic reason for the emergence of the fourfold division of society. But the phenomenon was also linked with the process of assimilation of the aboriginal non-Aryan people by the various sections of Aryan society. In a passage of the *Rigveda*, Vasishtha, who replaced Vishvamitra as the chief priest of Sudas and later came to be treated as the founder of a major brahmana *gotra*, is said to have been born of the seed of the Vedic gods Mitra and Varuna; his mother is not mentioned. But in the one and the same account he is said to have been 'born of the mind of Urvashi', born also of a jar which received the combined semen of the two gods; and discovered 'clad in the lightning' in a *pushkara* (tank). Modern racists may painlessly swallow the garbled version of his birth, which was evidently invented to gloss over his non-Aryan origin so as to facilitate his adoption into the Aryan fold. The same is true of Agastya, who is also said to have been born of a jar, involving no biological process. Several seers like Kanva and Angiras are described in the *Rigveda* as black, which points to their non-Aryan antecedents. Like the non-Aryan priesthood, some conquered chiefs were also assimilated and given high status. Such Dasa chiefs such as Balbhuta and Taruksha are said to have made generous gifts to the priests; they thus earned unstinted praise and gained in status in the Aryan social order. Even Sudas (literally 'good-giver') seems to have had a Dasa origin. The *Rigveda* does not throw any light on the process of assimilation of the pre-Aryan or non-Aryan commoners into the Aryan fold. Perhaps most of the ordinary

members of the aboriginal tribes were considered to be outside the pale of the Aryan life and were reduced to the lowest position in society. Social distance between the Aryans and the 'dark skinned, full-lipped, snub-nosed' non-Aryans increased over time. Not surprisingly they may have felt the need to retain the purity of their blood, little realizing that much non-Aryan blood was already flowing in their veins, just as some non-Aryan gods had wormed their way into the Vedic pantheon. For example, Rudra, whose arrows brought disease, evolved from a Harappan cult; so did Tvashtri (the Vedic Vulcan). A synthesis of Aryan and non-Aryan speaking peoples was taking place at different levels.

The Rigvedic gods were predominantly male as was natural in a patriarchal society. Their favour could be won through sacrifice. A number of domestic and public sacrifices are mentioned in the *Rigveda.* A passage from this text tells us that creation emanated from the first cosmic sacrifice. Prajapati (later known as Brahma) is thought of as a primeval man. He is said to have been sacrificed to himself by the gods who were apparently his children; and it was from the body of the divine victim that the universe was produced. This underscores the necessity of sacrifice for the maintenance of the world order, but the real development of the sacrificial cult took place in the second phase of Aryan expansion in India.

Among the gods the most popular was Indra, who shared some of the characteristics of the Greek god Zeus. Always ready to smite dragons and demons, he is credited with the sacking of many cities and is therefore called Purandara (breaker of forts). A warlord leading the Aryan tribes to victory against the demons, Indra is described as rowdy and amoral, and as fond of feasting and drinking Soma, which was the name of a heady drink as well as of the Vedic god of plants. The largest number of hymns—some two hundred and fifty of them—in the *Rigveda* is addressed to Indra. His servants were the Gandharvas (heavenly musicians). Their female counterparts were the beautiful, libidinous and seductive nymphs (*apsarasas*). One of them, Urvashi, admitted to her earthly lover Pururvas that 'friendship is not to be found in women' and has been associated with some kind of hetaerism. Next in importance was Agni, literally fire, who dwelt in the domestic hearth and acted as intermediary between gods and men; two hundred hymns of the *Rigveda* are devoted to him. Varuna was third in

importance to both Indra and Agni, though he was the upholder of the cosmic order (*rita*). Surya (the sun), Savitri (the deity to whom the famous *gayatri mantra* is addressed), and Pushan (guardian of roads, herdsmen and straying cattle) were the principal solar deities. Vishnu, a minor god, also had solar characteristics and was believed to have covered the earth in three steps. Some of the gods may be traced back to the period when the Aryans had not branched off from the Indo-European community. Amongst them Dyaus (the heavens personified) was the father-god, but lost his position of prominence in the Vedic pantheon. Few goddesses find mention in the *Rigveda*. Prominent among them are Ila, Aditi and Ushas. The gods were generally not married. Their wives are called *gnas* collectively, which is reminiscent of group marriage prevalent among the Aryans at some stage.

Great changes occurred in the Aryan mode of life during the later Vedic age, extending from 1000 to 600 BC when the three Vedas, *Yajur, Sama* and *Atharva*, the Brahamanas and a few early Upanishads were composed. The later Vedic works show a wider knowledge of Indian geography than is found in the *Rigveda*. They mention the 'two seas', the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean. Several Himalayan peaks are also mentioned. The Vindhya mountains are indirectly referred to. It would appear that during the period of the composition of the later Vedic texts the Aryans became generally familiar with the major portion of the Gangetic valley where they gradually settled.

During the later Vedic period the Aryans shifted their scene of activity from Panjab to nearly the whole of present-day western Uttar Pradesh covered by the Ganga-Yamuna doab. The Bharata and Purus, the two important tribes, came together and formed the Kuru people. From the fringes of the doab they moved to its upper portion called Kurukshetra or the land of the Kurus. Later they coalesced with the Panchalas. Together with the Kurus they occupied Delhi, and the upper and middle parts of the Ganga-Yamuna divide and established their capital at Hastinapur (Meerut district).

Towards the end of the later Vedic period Vedic people moved further east to Koshala in eastern Uttar Pradesh and Videha in north Bihar. In course of this eastward movement they encountered copper using groups who used a distinctive pottery called the Ochre Coloured

DISTRIBUTION OF PAINTED GREY WARE

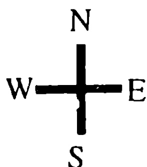
INDEX

PAINTED GREY WARE SITES 

MODERN TOWNS 

NATIONAL BOUNDARY 

Srinagar
RUPAR
Indus R.
HASTINAPUR
ALAMGIRPUR
BIKANER
AHICHHCHATRA
MATHURA
SHRAVASTI
JAIPUR
Brahmaputra R.
Ganga R.
KAUSHAMBI
VARANASI
UJJAIN
BHOPAL
JABALPUR
Narmada R.
Calcutta
RAIPUR
Bombay
Godavari R.
ARABIAN SEA
BAY OF BENGAL
Krishna R.
ANDAMAN and NICOBAR ISLANDS (India)
LAKSHADWEEP (India)
Cauvery R.
Madras



SCALE
500 km.
300 miles

INDIAN OCEA

Pottery, as well as people associated by archaeologists with the use of Black-and-Red Ware. They now seem to have forgotten their old home in the Panjab. References to it in the later Vedic texts are rare; the few that exist describe it as an impure land where the Vedic sacrifices were not performed.

According to one view the main line of Aryan thrust eastward was along the Himalayan foothills, north of the Ganga. But expansion in the area south of this river cannot be precluded. Initially the land was cleared by means of fire. In a famous passage of the *Shatapatha Brahmana* we are told that Agni moved eastward, burning the earth until he reached the river Sadanira, the modern Gandak. There he stopped. In his wake came the chieftain Videha Mathava, who caused the fire god to cross over the river. Thus the land of Videha was Aryanized; and it took its name from its colonizer. The legend may be treated as a significant account of the process of land clearance by burning, leading to the founding of new settlements by migrating warrior-peasants. Burning may have been supplemented by the use of the iron axe for cutting the forests in some areas. This metal is referred to in literature as *shyama ayas* (dark or black metal) and has also been found at excavated sites like Atranjikhera and Jakhera in western Uttar Pradesh and adjoining regions, whose dates fall in the time bracket of the later Vedic period. The number of iron agricultural tools and implements is less than that of the weapons. On this basis the importance of iron technology in facilitating the clearance of land has altogether been denied by some scholars who see no relationship between technological development and social change.

Numerous shards of Painted Grey Ware have been discovered in association with iron objects or independently at many places in western Uttar Pradesh and adjoining regions. The number of these sites would easily exceed 700 in the upper Gangetic basin, though only a few of them have been excavated. The pottery known as Painted Grey Ware has been generally associated with the later Vedic people and from the sites excavated so far one gets the impression that nomadism of the early Aryan migrants was considerably undermined. They lived a settled life in their wattle-and-daub houses erected on wooden poles, domesticated animals and practised agriculture more extensively than earlier. In the hymns desire is frequently expressed for increase in cattle, which still constituted the

principal form of movable property. Agriculture, however, tended to become the chief means of livelihood in the period; and the idea of private possession of land gradually began to crystallize. The *Shatapatha Brahmana* devotes an entire section to rites connected with ploughing and enumerates various agricultural operations. References to the yoking of six, eight, twelve and twenty-four oxen to the plough indicate deep ploughing. The *Atharvaveda* gives a ritual for leading river-water into new channels; it also speaks of spells to avoid drought and excessive rains. The buffalo seems to have been tamed for agriculture. In addition to barley, the chief crop cultivated during the period was wheat (*godhuma*), which continues to be the staple food in the Panjab and Uttar Pradesh to this day. Rice (*vrihi*) is mentioned for the first time, though very likely it was not an important crop in the upper Gangetic basin at this stage. Beans and sesamum were also known; the latter assumed ritual importance in course of time. All this does not mean a total disappearance of pastoralism, which continued to remain a reasonably prominent feature of life. This is suggested not only by the remains of cattle bones bearing cutmarks at Hastinapur, Atranjikhera, etc., but also by the later Vedic texts, especially the *Shatapatha Brahmana*, which refers to Yajnavalkya's spirited arguments in favour of eating beef. Nevertheless the growing importance of agriculture undoubtedly undermined the earlier pastoral economy, which could not adequately feed an increasing population.

Simultaneously with the transition from pastoral to agricultural economy there arose several new arts and crafts. Many of these are enumerated in the later Vedic literature. Mention may be made of smeltering, smithery or carpentry, weaving, leather-working, jewellery-making, dyeing and pottery-making. It is difficult to say how far smelters and smiths were connected with iron-working. Probably they worked mostly in copper, which continued to predominate, iron still being rare. Weaving was practised on a wide scale and perhaps remained confined mostly to women. Leather-work, pottery and carpentry were connected with building activities, of which we have some evidence in this period. Glass hoards and bangles found in course of excavations provide evidence of working in glass; these objects may have been used as prestige items by a limited number of people. The later Vedic texts refer not only to various arts and crafts, indicating progress in the differentiation of economic functions, but

also to the seas and sea voyages. All this indicates the rudimentary beginning of some kind of commerce in which the vaishyas participated. Reference to money lending first occurs in the *Shatapatha Brahmana,* which describes a usurer as *kusidin*, though definite evidence of the use of money is lacking. The term '*nishka* ' occurring in contemporary literature has sometimes been taken to mean a coin, but so far no actual specimens of coins of this period have come to light.

With the increasing importance of agriculture as a means of livelihood and the diversification of artisanal activity, the later Vedic people gradually relegated to the background their pastoralist and semi-nomadic subsistence strategies. Their life became settled and sedentary and they could perhaps produce enough for themselves and, to a certain extent, for the support of the priests and the ruling class. But they do not seem to have produced adequate surplus for the consumption of the people engaged in non-agricultural specialized crafts and occupations. They could not therefore contribute to the growth of towns and, despite textual references to the *nagara*, faint beginnings of urbanization can be seen only towards the end of the later Vedic period when Hastinapur (Meerut) and Kaushambi (Allahabad) emerged as rudimentary towns.

Settled life led to a further crystallization of the fourfold division of society. Initially one of the sixteen classes of priests, the brahmanas emerged as the most important class and claimed social and political privileges on account of the growing cult of sacrifice and ritual performed for their clients and patrons (mostly the *rajanyas/* kshatriyas). The kshatriyas constituted the warrior class and came to be looked on as protectors; the king was chosen from among them. The vaishyas devoted themselves to trade, agriculture and various crafts and were the tax-paying class. The shudras were supposed to serve the three higher *varnas* and formed the bulk of the labouring masses. Most likely the community exercised some sort of general control over them; in this sense they may be compared with the helots of Sparta. Shudras were not owned by members of the upper classes as slaves, the evidence for whose existence in the greater part of the Vedic period is lacking. A text speaks of ten thousand women slaves captured from various countries and given by Anga to his brahmana priest; but there is no mention of men slaves. Obviously their number was far too small to attract any notice.

With the emergence of the caste system certain social norms developed. Marriage between the members of the same *gotra* was not permitted. This applied especially to brahmanas, who were by now divided into exogamous *gotra* groups. Members of the higher *varnas* could marry shudra women. But marriage between men of the lower orders and women of the upper *varnas* was discountenanced. This was due to the gradual strengthening of *varna* distinctions, which began to appear in social life. A special position was claimed for brahmanas and kshatriyas, distinguishing them from vaishyas and shudras—a tendency which became pronounced in later centuries. Although rules restricting interdining between the higher and the lower orders had not yet evolved, the first signs of the extreme form of social exclusion manifesting itself as untouchability in the subsequent times began to appear in this period; autochthonous people like the Chandalas and Paulkasas were objects of spite and abhorrence.

The family became increasingly patriarchal; the birth of a son was more welcome than that of a daughter who was often considered a source of misery. Princes could take several wives, though polyandry was not unknown. A reference to self-immolation by the widow at the death of her husband is found, and the origin of the later practice of *sati* has sometimes been traced to this period. But it is certain that *sati* did not prevail on any considerable scale, for we hear of remarriage of widows (*niyoga*). In a contemporary text woman is classed with dice and wine as one of the three chief evils. A good woman, the *Aitareya Brahmana* tells us, is one who does not talk back; and in this period women ceased to participate in the deliberations of the tribal council called the *sabha*. Yet the early marriage of girls had not yet become customary, and here and there they attended lectures by *gurus* and learnt the Vedas. Gargi Vachaknavi is said to have attended a discussion with the sage Yajnavalkya and even to have embarrassed him by her searching questions.

The material and social developments of the age were amply reflected in the contemporary political system. Kingship underwent much change. Its earlier tribal character came to be diluted, with increasing emphasis on the territorial aspect of the institution. In a passage of the *Atharvaveda* the *rashtra* (territory) is said to have been held by the king and made firm by the king Varuna, and the gods Brihaspati, Indra and Agni. The coronation ceremony called *rajasuya*,

for which a fixed place was necessary, is said to have extended over two years. The territorial aspect of kingship is clear from a text which enumerates ten forms of government prevalent in different parts of the country. Unlike the earlier period, kings now ruled over territories and not over nomadic groups moving from place to place.

Several kingdoms came to be established. In the Kuru-Panchala (Delhi-Meerut-Mathura) region the Kurus ruled from Hastinapur where excavations have revealed settlements belonging to the period 1000-700 BC. They fought a fratricidal war with their collaterals, the Pandavas, in 950 BC, at Kurukshetra near Delhi; its magnified version formed the theme of the great epic *Mahabharata*, compiled much later around the fourth century AD. To the east of the Ganga-Yamuna confluence, there existed the kingdom of Koshala. Rama, the hero of the *Ramayana*, came to be associated with it. Neither he nor his father Dasaratha figures in contemporary literature; it is a different matter that in our own times his overzealous devotees have unashamedly politicized him to damage the social fabric of India. East of Koshala was the kingdom of Kashi in the Banaras region. Another kingdom was Videha. Its kings bore the title Janaka, which is mentioned more than once in the later Vedic texts. South of Videha on the southern side of the Ganga was the kingdom of Magadha, then of little importance.

Territorial monarchy derived strength from taxation, which started in this period. Settled life and relatively stable agriculture led to the production of a moderate surplus, and this could be collected by the king in the form of taxes paid in grain and cattle, and most probably not regularly. In the *Shatapatha Brahmana* the king is described as a devourer of the people (*vishamatta*), because he lived on what was realized from them. This presents a contrast to the earlier period when he thrived on voluntary tribute and offerings. An official called the *bhagadugha*, who collected the royal share of the produce, is mentioned in later Vedic texts.

The income from taxes enabled the king to appoint officers. We hear of twelve *ratnins* (jewel-bearers), whose houses the king visited at the time of coronation in order to offer oblations to the appropriate deity there. Probably they were high functionaries and looked after metal-working, chariot-making, chariot-driving, etc. The list includes an officer-in-charge of the royal treasure (*samgrahitri*) and the chief

priest (*purohita*). These officers were under the direct control of the king and were maintained out of the taxes and tributes collected from the people. Although there was no standing army, the growth of the royal entourage enhanced the power and prestige of the king.

The vicissitudes of the Vedic assemblies also contributed to the enhancement of the king's power. The *vidatha* disappeared completely; the other two, the *sabha* and *samiti*, lost their importance. In the emergent territorial states with jurisdiction over comparatively larger areas, ordinary people could hardly afford to travel long distances to attend the meetings of the popular assemblies. Those who may have attended such meetings were either chiefs or wealthy members of society. This gave an aristocratic character to the *sabha* and *samiti* and took away much of their effectiveness. They lost some of their activities to the new officials called the *ratnins*.

What may have added substantially to royal authority was that kingship ceased to be elective. The coronation rituals of the period are reminiscent of the earlier elective nature of the king's office. But one text prescribes formulas for extending kingship for one, two and three generations, another for ten generations. Thus kingship became hereditary and gained in power. A glamour was created around the person of the king by involving various gods at the consecration ceremony to endow him with their respective qualities; in the rituals he was sometimes also represented as a god.

The king derived much ideological support from the emerging brahmana class. In a passage of the *Atharvaveda* he is described as the protector of brahmanas and the eater of the people. He is required to give a pledge to the brahmana priest that he would stand by the law. Another text states that the king and the *shrotriya* (learned brahmana) together would uphold *dharma*; other sections of society are not mentioned. This suggests some kind of understanding and cooperation between the priests and warriors; its necessity is stressed by the *Shatapatha Brahmana*. Despite occasional references to conflicts between the princes and priests, from now on priests began to be subservient to rulers so as to strike mephistophelean bargains.

With rising royal pretensions and priestly ambitions there took place a great development in the sacrificial cult. Several new lengthy royal sacrifices developed, and instructions for their meticulous performance occupy much space in the later Vedic literature. The

vajapeya (drink of strength) sacrifice lasted seventeen days to a year, and was believed not only to restore the strength of a middle-aged king but also to raise him from a simple *raja* to a *samrat*, a monarch who owed allegiance to none and controlled several kings. The *rajasuya* or royal consecration was another complex sacrifice: the honorarium paid to the presiding priest in extreme cases amounted to 240,000 cows. The most famous, significant and complex royal sacrifice was the *ashvamedha* (horse sacrifice), which lasted for three days, although the preparatory ceremonies extended over a year or even two. Four officiants, four wives of the king with their 400 attendants and a large number of spectators took part. A specially consecrated horse was set free to roam at will for a year, escorted by a chosen band of 400 warriors so that any king trying to capture the animal might be combated. The horse was brought back to the capital at the end of the year and sacrificed along with 600 bulls. The king's wives walked round the carcass; the chief queen lay down beside it simulating copulation. The ceremony concluded with a sacrifice of 21 sterile cows and the distribution of fabulous fees to the priests. The horse sacrifice was supposed to confer victory and sovereignty, and because of this, was performed sporadically in later times. Apart from this, domestic rites consisting of small sacrifices with simple ceremonial were also performed in the later Vedic period.

Elaborate sacrificial rites undermined the importance of the Rigvedic gods, some of whom faded into the background. The priests became the chief beneficiaries of the sacrifices and consequently gained in power. Cattle were slaughtered at sacrifices, often in large numbers. Animal bones with cut marks found in course of excavations at Atranjikhera and other places are mostly of cattle. Public rituals, therefore, led to the decimation of the cattle wealth, whose importance for the developing agricultural economy can hardly be overestimated.

The first reaction to brahmanical dominance and the extremely ritualistic later Vedic religion can be seen in the Upanishads, which reflect a wider spirit of enquiry prevalent towards the end of the Vedic period. Upanishadic thought centres round the idea of soul (*atman*) and not sacrifice (*yajna*). Creation is said to have grown out of the primeval desire of the World Soul. In the Upanishads we find the first clear exposition of belief in the passage of the soul from life to life. Souls were thought of as being born to happiness or sorrow

according to their conduct in the previous life. From this evolved the theory of *karma* (action), which preached that the deeds of one life affected the next. This doctrine sought to provide an explanation of human suffering, and became fundamental to most later Indian thought.

By the time of the Upanishads asceticism had become fairly widespread. Ascetics lived either as solitary hermits or in small groups away from society. Living off its resources, they could not have created a counter-culture in a real sense, as has been suggested by some scholars. Nevertheless through self-training the hermit acquired magical power, formerly ascribed to sacrifices. Asceticism thus challenged the supremacy of the Vedic sacrifice (*yajna*) and of the brahmanas who chiefly profited from it. The brahmanas by way of compromise invented a formula by which the life of an individual was divided into four stages (*ashramas*). First he was to be a *brahmacharin*, leading a celibate and austere life as a student at his teacher's house. Having learnt the Vedas or part of them he was married, and became a householder (*grihastha*). When well advanced in age, he withdrew from worldly life to become an ascetic (*vanaprastha*). Finally in the ultimate phase of life, having freed his soul from material ties by meditation and self-torture, he became a wandering ascetic (*sanyasin*). In this artificial scheme, asceticism was recommended at the end of a man's life so that he could discharge his social responsibilities before taking to it.

The four *ashramas* were not meant for the shudras. Nor was education allowed to the members of the lower *varnas*. Education began with an investiture ceremony (*upanayana*, literally 'leading forth of a boy for study under a teacher'), whereby a boy was initiated as a full member of society. It was confined to brahmanas, kshatriyas and vaishyas: the shudras were not entitled to it. In Vedic times girls were also sometimes initiated. Since the rite was thought of as accomplishing a second birth, members of the three higher *varnas* were described by the epithet *dvija* (twice-born), though later many kshatriyas and vaishyas ceased to perform the initiation ceremony.

Theoretically education was open to all *dvijas*, though the Vedas tended to become an exclusive preserve of the brahmanas. The student (*brahmacharin*) was trained at the home of a brahmana teacher for a number of years; the Vedas constituted the main subject of study.

Education was imparted orally and learning was by rote; oral transmission of knowledge has been, in fact, an integral part of Indian tradition. A late Rigvedic passage draws a lively comparison between the pupils repeating lessons after the teacher and frogs gathering and croaking in the rainy season. The student was required to memorize the scriptures syllable by syllable; and the brahmanas developed a unique system of mnemonics. But unlike the Harappans, the Vedic people do not seem to have used a script. There is no clear reference to writing in the entire body of Vedic literature. The earliest surviving specimens of a decipherable script are found in the inscriptions of Ashoka (third century BC) written in Brahmi, which presupposes several centuries of development.

CHAPTER 4

The Material Background of Religious Dissent: Jainism and Buddhism

THE COLONIZATION of the middle Gangetic plains by the Vedic people and related developments in the second half of the first millennium BC can be studied with the help of diverse sources. The early Pali texts composed by Buddhists are of much value. The *Vinaya Pitaka* dealing with the rules of the Buddhist Samgha, the *Sutta Pitaka* or collection of the Buddha's sermons, and the *Abhidhamma Pitaka* devoted to the discussion of metaphysical problems, throw light on changing patterns of life and thought. Scholars have often differed on the chronology of these Pitakas and of the 551 Buddhist birth stories called the Jatakas, which form part of the *Sutta Pitaka*. But major portions of these texts may be placed between 600 and 400 BC, while the Jataka stories by and large may be assigned a later date. The Pali works were written in the language of Magadha and therefore reflect mainly the conditions obtaining in eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. They are generally reliable for all of northern India if considered in conjunction with the grammar of Panini (500-400 BC) and the Grihyasutras and Dharmasutras which generally belong to 600-300 BC. Archaeologists have also brought to light a vast bulk of evidence. During the last five decades they have dug up various places like Ahichchhatra, Hastinapur, Kaushambi, Ujjaini, Shravasti, Vaishali and many more which find mention in the texts. In the process they have discovered the remains of houses, buildings and towns. They have also found a variety of objects including a deluxe pottery called the Northern Black Polished Ware. Archaeological material interpreted in conjunction with the literary texts provides a clue to the understanding of the major social and economic

transformation in north-east India including eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar in the second half of the first millennium BC, which saw the penetration of the Vedic people into this region and the introduction of a new agricultural economy in the area.

The middle Gangetic basin has had an average annual rainfall between 114 and 140 cm. It was thickly forested around the sixth-fifth centuries BC as can be inferred from references to the four great forests (*maha-aranyas*) and from the derivation of some modern place names. For example, Arrah is derived from ancient Aranya (forest), Saran from Naimisharanya and Champaran from Champaranya. Similarly most cities associated with early Buddhism are named after some plant. The large-scale colonization and the spread of agriculture in an area under a thick forest cover was possible on account of the greater use of iron tools and implements for clearing the land as well as for various agricultural operations. The use of bellows, hammer, anvil, etc., made possible the manufacture of iron tools and implements on a large scale. Not surprisingly textual references to iron ploughshares are many; and archaeological evidence, though comparatively weak, is not altogether absent. Leaving aside the iron ploughshares found at Ropar and Jakhera in the preceding period, these have also been discovered at Kaushambi (Allahabad) and at Raghuasoi, a place near Vaishali in Bihar in post-Vedic times. Besides, an impressive amount of iron slag and objects (which include axes, sickles and chisels) have been unearthed at Rajghat (Banaras). The number of agricultural tools and implements discovered in excavations may not be very large but this may be due to the moist and corrosive nature of the soil in the middle Gangetic plains. The mention of the *kuddala* (hoe/spade) and *kuddalika* (one who earns his livelihood with the help of this tool) in a brahmanical text suggests that the use of the iron ploughshare was supplemented by that of the hoe. All this indicates the diffusion of iron technology. More importantly, the available evidence convincingly proves that iron tools and implements were used for purposes other than war and certainly for clearing forest and bringing more and more land under the plough with the help of iron ploughshares that made deep ploughing possible, with consequent proliferation of territorial settlements. The clearance of forest received scriptural sanction. According to a lawgiver the king could injure fruit and flower bearing trees for the extension of agriculture and for

sacrifice. The main initiative in extending the area of cultivation may have come from the community or the emergent state, but individual efforts in the matter were not unknown. An example of the sale of forest land cleared by the proprietor or his ancestors is recorded in a Buddhist text.

The use of effective implements was accompanied by an improved knowledge of cultivation and of a variety of crops. Panini, the first grammarian of the Sanskrit language who lived in the fifth century BC, tells us that fields were ploughed twice or thrice and were classified according to the crops grown on them. The early Buddhist texts refer to the best, the middling and the inferior quality of fields; they also show a knowledge of irrigation, and of the detailed processes of cultivation including the practice of keeping the land fallow. The agricultural calendar based on six seasons and 27 constellations was already known in the later Vedic period; now it became well established. The practice of transplanting paddy began in the post-Vedic period; wet rice cultivation led to larger output of food grains. Various types of paddy were grown; in addition peasants also produced barley, wheat, millets, cotton and sugarcane. Attention has also been drawn to the utilization of plants and fruit trees which are not mentioned in the earlier texts. Among these the mango (*amra*) occupies a place of importance; the prettiest prostitute of Vaishali and a contemporary of the Buddha, was called Ambapali (Sanskrit, Amrapali). The new agricultural economy was supplemented by animal husbandry. Archaeologists have recovered large numbers of bones of cattle, sheep, goat, horses and pigs from many sites and probably some of them were slaughtered for food. Despite the great strides that agriculture took in the post-Vedic phase, the whole country could not have come under the plough and there were many areas where people lived at a primitive level of material culture—a phenomenon with which we are familiar even today. Yet the general impression that we get is one of wide dispersal of stable plough agriculture and an increase in the number of settlements. This impression is strengthened by the fact that no less than 550 sites with the deluxe pottery called Northern Black Polished Ware (a distinctive artefact category) of the period from the sixth century up to the first century BC) have been either explored or excavated in the upper and middle Ganga plains.

DISTRIBUTION OF NORTHERN BLACK POLISHED WARE

INDEX

NORTH BLACK POLISHED WARE SITES 

MODERN TOWNS 

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UDEGRAM
CHARSADA
TAXILA
KANDAHAR
Srinagar
Indus R.
RUPAR
PANIPAT
HASTINAPUR
DELHI
AHICHCHHATRA
TILAURA-KOT
BAIRAT
NOH
SHRAVASTI
KANAUJ
VAISHALI
Ganga R.
Brahmaputra R.
KAUSHAMBI
BANGAR
AWRA
NAGDA
RAJGHAT
RAJGIR
ERAN
UJJAIN
Narmada R.
TRIPURI
CHANDRAKETUGARH
MAHESHWAR
TAMLUK
PRABHASPATAN
PRAKASH
Culcutta
BAHAL
KAUNDANPUR
NASIK
SHISHUPALGARH
Bombay
NEVASA
ARABIAN SEA
TER
Godavari R.
Hyderabad
BAY OF BENGAL
Krishna R
BRAHMAPUR
AMARAVATI
CHEBROL
Madras
Cauvery R.
LAKSHADWEEP (India)
ANDAMAN and NICOBAR ISLANDS (India)
INDIAN OCEAN
SCALE
500 km.
300 miles
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W
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S

Improved knowledge of cultivation and the use of effective implements enabled peasants to produce greater surpluses, which helped the growth of towns. Jaina canonical writings mention different kinds of urban centres in the age of Mahavira. In the fourth century BC Aristobulus, who was sent on commission by Alexander, claimed that he saw the remains of more than a thousand towns in the Indus area. Even if this is an exaggeration there is little doubt that many towns sprang up in northern India. Taking the country as a whole nearly sixty towns are assigned to the period 600–300 BC. Shravasti was one of the twenty big cities, and six of them were important enough to be associated with the passing away of Gautama Buddha. These were Champa (modern Bhagalpur in Bihar), Rajagriha (nearly 96 km south of Patna), Saketa (in eastern UP), Kaushambi (64 km from Allahabad), Banaras, and Kushinara (modern Kasia in the Deoria district of UP). The existence of no less than ten urban centres in the middle Ganga basin during 600–300 BC is proved by both archaeology and contemporary literature. Thus a remarkable beginning of town life in north-eastern India seems to have taken place around the sixth century BC.

An important factor that helped the growth of towns was the movement of Alexander's army from mainland Greece to India. It opened up a number of trade routes and revealed the possibilities of mercantile relations between north-west India and Western Asia. Besides, routes to the Deccan and south India offered new markets for north Indian commodities. The discovery of Northern Black Polished Ware, whose epicentre was the Gangetic valley, and iron objects assignable to the pre-Maurya period in the northern Deccan, suggests some kind of commercial contact. But the main trade routes were along the Ganga, from Rajagriha to Kaushambi, which connected Ujjain (Madhya Pradesh) with Broach, the chief port for sea trade with the West; the route from Kaushambi leading across the Panjab to Taxila was an outlet for India's overland trade with the north-west.

Trade was both the cause and effect of increasing urbanization. The Jatakas, the Buddhist birth stories, make numerous references to caravans with 500 or 1000 carts going from one place to another. One such group of 500 carts is mentioned as passing by a street where Gautama Buddha was meditating. On his way to Rajagriha the Buddha is said to have met Belattha, who was going toward

Andhakovinda (an unidentified place) with 500 wagons filled with jars of sugar. Merchants such as horse-dealers from Uttarapatha are described as moving from one place to another to sell their goods. Cloth seems to have been an important article of trade, for the early Pali texts suggest that cotton came into general use in north-eastern India in the age of the Buddha. But trade was mainly confined to luxury articles.

Trade received a great fillip with the use of metal coins in the post-Vedic period. In spite of Vedic testimony, the prevalence of coins in the preceding period remains extremely doubtful. The earliest coins discovered in India cannot be dated beyond the time of the Buddha. These coins were issued by merchants and bore punch-marks, whence the term 'punch-marked' is used to describe them. According to one view more than three hundred hoards of punch-marked coins are known. Many of these have been found in the middle Ganga plains indicating a reasonably high level of monetization of the region. The use of coins in this period seems to have become so common that even the price of a dead mouse is stated in terms of money.

The growth of towns, trade and money economy are closely linked with the development of diverse arts and crafts which had their beginnings in the earlier period. Apart from such service occupations as those of the washerman and dyer, the painter, the barber, the tailor-weaver and the cook, several manufacturing crafts are mentioned in the early Buddhist texts. There was the reed-worker, the potter, the vehicle-maker, the needle-maker, the goldsmith, the metalsmith, the carpenter, the ivory-worker, the garland-maker and the silk-manufacturer. The existence of so many crafts implies increasing specialization in the field of commodity production.

Artisans and craftsmen were very often organized into guilds. Later Buddhist literature refers to the existence of eighteen guilds in Rajagriha, though the names of only four, wood-workers, smiths, leather-workers and painters, are specified. Each guild inhabited a particular section of the town. This led not only to the localization of crafts and industries but also to their hereditary transmission from father to son. Every guild was presided over by a head (*jetthaka*). The *setthis*, who also sometimes headed the guilds, handled trade and

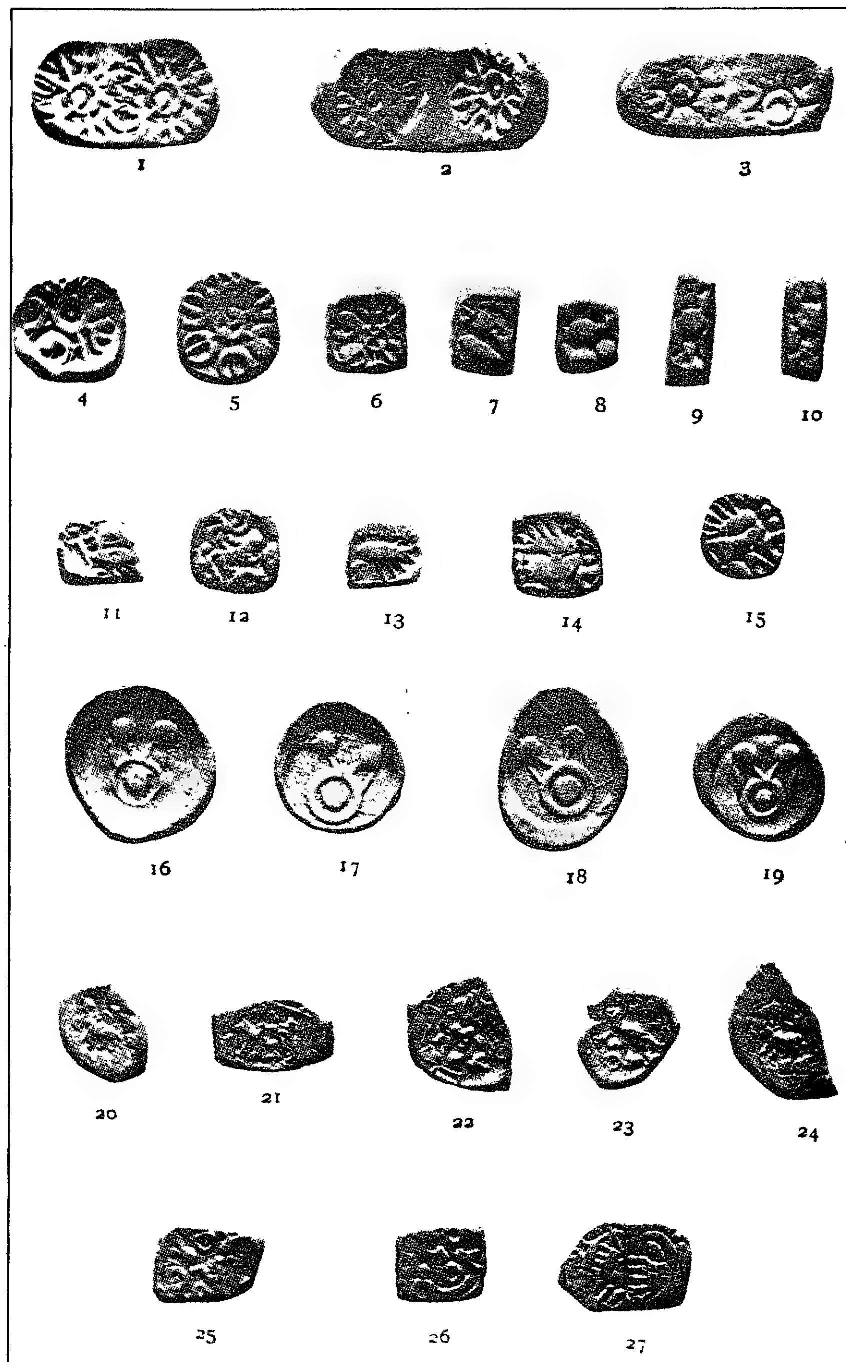


Plate 3: Punch-marked coins.

industries. They generally lived in towns, but those among them that were granted revenues of villages for their maintenance (*bhogagama*) by the king had to keep links with the countryside. The *setthi* was in some sense a financier or banker and sometimes also head of a trade-guild. He was treated with respect even by absolute and despotic kings. All this implies that in towns artisans and *setthis* were emerging as important social groups.

In the countryside also a new social group was coming to the forefront by virtue of its wealth. The greater part of land came to be owned by *gahapatis* (peasant proprietors). In the earlier period the word *gahapati* (literally, the lord of the house) stood for the host and principal sacrificer at any considerable sacrifice. But in the age of the Buddha it came to mean 'the head of a large patriarchal household of any caste who got respect primarily because of his wealth', which in the post-Vedic period was measured not so much in cattle as in land. References to several affluent *gahapatis* occur in the early Buddhist writings. The *gahapati* Mendaka is described as paying wages to the royal army; as donor he is said to have instituted 1250 cowherds to serve the Buddha and his Samgha. Anathapindika, another *gahapati*, is said to have paid a fabulous price for Jetavana, a plot of land which he donated to the Buddha. A *gahapati* of Saketa is referred to as giving 16,000 coins and a male and a female slave to the physician Jivaka; another *gahapati* of Banaras is reported to have given 16,000 coins to him for curing his son. Sometimes *gahapatis* are also represented as lending money to promising shopkeepers. The emergence of the *gahapati* from the Vedic householder to a comparatively wealthy head of the household may indicate the growing disparity of wealth within society. Common people, slaves and labourers seem to have coveted his wealth and wished him harm; often he is depicted as maintaining a bodyguard to defend himself.

The rise of a new wealthy class in villages and towns caused economic inequalities, which further liquidated the tribal ideals of kinship and equality. Many tribes of the Vedic period were affected by the concentration of private property in the hands of fewer persons. This naturally tended to strengthen the fourfold division of society. Social, legal and economic privileges of the higher castes, and disabilities of the lower ones were for the first time defined in the brahmanical lawbooks during post-Vedic times. Many aboriginal tribes,

which remained unaffected by the knowledge of iron technology, lived at a very low level of material culture. The cultural gap between the autochthons, living mainly as hunters and fowlers and the *varna*-divided society which possessed the knowledge of iron implements and agriculture, perhaps led in the post-Vedic period to the growth of untouchability. However, interaction between the literate brahmanical social order and pre- and non-literate people has, despite the growth of the various forms of social marginality, continued through Indian history and has made Indian society what it is.

The newly developed feature of the social and economic life of the people did not fit in with the Vedic ritualism and animal sacrifice, which had become a source of senseless decimation of cattle wealth, the main basis of the new plough agriculture. The conflict between the Vedic religious practices and the aspirations of the rising social groups led to the search for new religious and philosophical ideas which would fit with the basic changes in the material life of the people. Thus in the sixth century BC in the Gangetic valley there emerged many new religious teachers who preached against Vedic religion. Not surprisingly the Buddhist sources speak of as many as 62 religious sects and the Jaina texts refer to 363 sects in the sixth century BC. Of these many were based on regional customs and rituals. But some of them may have formed the basis of later philosophical ideas. Thus Ajita Keshakambalin propagated a thoroughgoing materialistic doctrine called annihilationism (*uchchhedavada*) from which the Lokayata or Charvaka* school of philosophy is believed to have derived a great deal. Pakudha Katyayana, another religious leader, held that just as the earth, water, air and light are primary indestructible elements, so are sorrow, happiness and life; it has been suggested that the later Vaisheshika school originated from his ideas. Purana Kassapa, still another contemporary preacher,

*The Lokayata (literally, widespread in the world) philosophy was supposed to have been popular among the people. The *Brihaspatisutra* (also *Lokayatasutra*), on which much of India's materialist thinking was based, existed in some form as early as the second century BC, as can be inferred from Patanjali's reference to it. But it is now irretrievably lost. The only materialist philosophical text that has survived is the *Tattvopalavasimha* written by a certain Jayarashi in the eighth century. Materialism, however, remained an

regarded the soul as distinct from the body and laid the foundations of what came to be known as the Samkhya system of philosophy. His immediate following, however, merged into that of Makkhali Gosala, the exponent of the Ajivika sect, who drank, went naked and practised orgiastic sexual rites and believed that the soul had to pass through an immutable cycle of predetermined rebirths, irrespective of any action by the particular body to which it was attached in each birth.

Of all the sects prevalent in northern India around the sixth century BC, only Jainism and Buddhism came to stay in India as independent religions. The Jaina ideas were already being circulated in the seventh century BC by Parshva, to whom four fundamental principles of Jainism are ascribed. They are: taking no life (*ahimsa*), taking no property from others, possessing no property of one's own and truthfulness. Mahavira added celibacy to this list.

Vardhamana Mahavira, who belonged to the Jnatri kshatriya clan, was born in the suburb of Vaishali called Kundagrama. His father Siddhartha was a wealthy noble; his mother Trishala was the sister of a Lichchhavi prince Chetaka of Vaishali. Vardhamana was married to his cousin Yashoda, and had by her a daughter who was married to his nephew Jamali. At the age of thirty, Mahavira left his home and wandered twelve years as an ascetic, resting only in the rainy season. In the thirteenth year by severest penances and constant meditation he reached his ultimate state of knowledge (*kevalya*) under a *sala* tree on the bank of the river Rijupalika near the village Jrimbhikagrama, whose identification is uncertain. He spent the rest of his life in preaching his religious ideas, and organizing the Jaina order of ascetics in Magadha and Anga. But in later centuries Jainism found a congenial soil in Gujarat and Rajasthan, parts of north India and Karnataka in the south, especially the Mysore region. The teachings of the Jina

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important undercurrent of Indian thought. The Lokayatikas were thought of as preaching unabashed epicureanism and were therefore viewed with scorn by the orthodox. From the early centuries of the Christian era Lokayata philosophy came to be increasingly associated with Charvaka, who is supposed to have been a pupil of Brihaspati. In the *Mahabharata* the brahmana Charvaka is described as reproaching Yudhishthira for having killed his kinsmen in the war of succession. It is significant that in the crucial passage other brahmanas treat him as a demon in disguise and burn him to ashes.

Mahavira were first collated and recorded in the third century BC; but their final compilation did not take place till the Jaina council met at Valabhi in the early sixth century AD.

Jainism is essentially atheistic, the concept of god being irrelevant. But it accepts a group of *tirthankaras* (prophets) who were deified men. Every mortal possesses the potential of becoming as great as them. Jainism conceives of the universe as functioning according to eternal law, continually passing through a series of cosmic waves of progress and decline. According to it, the sole purpose of life is the purification of the soul. The theory of *syadavada* is an essential ingredient of Jaina philosophy. It states that no absolute and final affirmation or denial is possible, because knowledge is relative. Unlike the Upanishads, Jainism preaches that the purification of the soul cannot be achieved through knowledge but only through a long course of fasting, rigorous practice of non-violence, truth, non-stealing, renunciation and sexual continence. The vow of non-killing (*ahimsa*) was practised to the point of absurdity. Even an unconscious killing of an ant while walking was against Jaina morals. The Jainas would not drink water without straining it for fear of killing an insect. They also wore a muslin mask over the mouth not for hygiene but to save any life floating in the air. They were forbidden not only the practice of war but also of agriculture, for both involve the killing of living beings. Fasting and self-mortification of all kinds occupied an important place in the Jaina monastic life. Castigation of one's own flesh for long hours in the blazing sun, and rain was an approved practice. Mahavira himself discarded all clothing though Parshva had permitted the use of three garments. Thus in utter contrast to Gosala, who stood for individualistic, licentious self-indulgence, Mahavira believed that rigorous ascetic punishment of the body would free the soul from sorrows. But the common feature of the ideas of both religious teachers was their extremism which could never win a mass following.

Of all the religious preachers of the sixth century BC, Gautama Buddha is the best known. His religion had a more popular social base. Gautama, also known as Siddhartha, was born in 586 BC in the kshatriya tribe of the Shakyas headed by his father Suddhodhana; his mother was Mahamaya. As a young prince Gautama received the usual kshatriya training in the art of warfare. Like Mahavira, he was

married to a cousin whose name was Yasodhara, and begot a son Rahula. But smitten by the sorrows of life he left his home at the age of twenty-nine, shaved off his hair and became an ascetic. He went from place to place seeking guidance, without satisfaction. As a last resort, for the sake of salvation, he gave up asceticism and took to meditation. He made the final discovery at Gaya under a *pipal* tree on the bank of the Niranjana river (the modern Phalgu). He preached his sermon at Sarnath near Banaras and won back five disciples who had deserted him when he had abandoned the rigid path of asceticism. This sermon was called the Turning of the Wheel of Law (*dharma-chakrapravartana*) and formed the nucleus of all Buddhist teachings. For forty-five years Gautama Buddha wandered on foot to propagate his ideas. But in the west he did not travel beyond Kaushambi; in the east he regularly passed through Rajgir and Gaya and also visited Dakhinagiri near Mirzapur on the southern bank of the Ganga. He died at eighty, at Kushinara. His death is said to have been caused by a meal of pork (*sukaramaddava*), which he had taken with his lay disciple Chunda at Pava.

The central theme of Buddha's religion is the eight-step path (*ashtangamarga*). The first step is the proper vision leading to the realization that the world is full of sorrows caused by desire, greed, etc. The second step is right aim, which leaves no room for covetousness or indulgence but encourages everybody to love others fully and increase their happiness. Right speech is the third step; it implies the practice of truthfulness promoting mutual friendship. Proper action, the fourth step, includes abstention from killing, stealing, and fornication, and performance of such deeds as would benefit other people. The fifth step is proper livelihood, earned by pure and honest means. Right effort, the sixth step, means mental exercise to avoid evil thoughts. The seventh step is correct awareness, according to which the human body is made of unclear substance. The last step is meditation leading to the removal of evils generated by bonds of flesh and attachment to the mind. Anyone who would follow this noble eightfold path would attain final salvation (*nirvana*) irrespective of his social origin.

Certain features are common to Jainism and Buddhism. First, the proponents of both sects had to put in considerable mental and physical effort. This is proved by the extremely austere life of Mahavira

and Gautama. Second, both religions denied the authority of the Vedas and opposed animal sacrifice, which brought them into conflict with the brahmanical orthodoxy. The technological change owing to the introduction of iron led to the increasing development of plough cultivation which was mainly dependent on animal husbandry. Viewed in this background the doctrine of non-injury to animals appears significant. The concept of *ahimsa,* popularized for the first time, helped agriculture, which could support at least ten times as many people per square mile as a pastoral economy in the same region. But undue emphasis on non-violence in Jainism stood in the way of its propagation among the agriculturists whose profession necessarily involved killing insects and pests. Nor did Mahavira's ideas become acceptable to those artisans and craftsmen whose occupation endangered the life of other creatures. The strict Jaina restriction on owning private property was interpreted as a ban only on the possession of property in land. The followers of Jainism therefore specialized in the traffic of manufactured goods and confined themselves to financial transactions. This probably explains why Jainism came to be increasingly associated with the spread of urban culture and maritime trade. India's western coast facilitated foreign trade, and therefore it is not without reason that the population in this area is predominantly Jaina even today.

Compared to Jainism, Buddhism was moderate in its stress on *ahimsa.* Although Buddhism clearly enjoins abstention from taking any life, it did not prevent its followers from eating meat if provided by non-Buddhist butchers. Nevertheless Buddha's emphasis on not slaying cattle was deliberate. A very early Buddhist work states that the cattle should be protected because they 'are our friends just as parents and relatives' and 'cultivation depends upon them' That cattle were indispensable to cultivation was recognized by Buddhism. In the *Digha Nikaya* the Buddha recalls the legend of the king Mahavijita who was advised by his priest to supply seeds to the peasants, and cattle and suitable implements to those who wanted to serve the state. Since Buddhism, unlike Jainism, showed a greater awareness of the contemporary needs of agriculture, it was acceptable to the village folk.

Both Buddhism and Jainism adopted identical attitudes to trade. The earliest brahmanical lawbooks prescribed trade and agriculture

for the vaishyas, who were ranked third in the social hierarchy. In times of distress the brahmanas could engage in trade, but they could not deal in liquids, perfumes, cloth, butter or food grains. Apparently those who traded in these commodities were looked down upon by the earliest lawgivers. The inhabitants of Magadha and Anga were held in low esteem because they traded in certain commodities. Baudhayana even condemns voyaging by sea as a sinful practice. In contrast to this, Buddhist literature mentions sea voyages with approval. The Buddha's attitude towards trade seems to have been favourable; he and the Samgha received generous gifts from Anathapindika and other rich merchants. In view of the brahmanical attitude it was natural for the newly rising merchant class to turn to Buddhism for sanction. That the first persons to become the Buddha's lay followers, only eight weeks after his obtaining perfect insight, were the two caravaneers passing through Bodh Gaya could not have been accidental.

Trade and the use of money gave rise to money-lending and usury, but the Dharmashastra writers did not favour these new practices. Apastamba, an early lawgiver, lays down that the brahmanas should not accept food from a person who charged interest, or from one living on the labour of a person held as mortgage presumably in return for interest on the loan. He adds that a brahmana approaching the person who lends money on interest should expiate his sin. Baudhayana prescribes money-lending for vaishyas but condemns the brahmana who practices usury. The early Buddhist canon defines right livelihood and right action but nowhere condemns usury. In fact numerous references suggest that an intimate relationship existed between the Buddha and the *setthis* who perhaps lent money on interest. The Buddha even advises the householder to pay off his debts and does not allow a debtor to join the order. In other words Buddhism, in contrast to brahmanism, gave its support, indirect though it may have been, to usury, which was symptomatic of the mercantile economy of the Gangetic valley.

We notice a sharp difference between the brahmanical and the Buddhist attitude to certain features of urban life. The brahmana lawgivers do not seem to have approved of eating houses, which obviously must have been a necessary concomitant of urbanization. Apastamba advised members of the higher castes (mostly brahmanas) not to eat food prepared in shops. But the Buddhist texts do not

exhibit such an attitude. Another significant development in urban social life was the growth of prostitution. The birth of towns and the break-up of the old tribal family due to the sharpening of caste differences may have created a class of alienated women who became prostitutes to eke out a living. The early Buddhist literature refers to prostitutes living in towns. Vaishali became famous because of Ambapali, who charged 50 *karshapana* a night. Prompted by this, Bimbisara, the king of Magadha and a contemporary of the Buddha, appointed a courtesan for the capital city of Rajagriha, who charged double the amount taken by Ambapali. But the brahmanical injunctions condemn prostitution. Baudhayana and Apastamba forbid brahmanas to accept food from prostitutes (*ganika*) or unchaste women. In contrast to this is the fact that the Buddha once lived as a guest of Ambapali. Initially reluctant to admit women to his church he had thrice turned down the request of his widowed aunt Mahapajapati Gotami, but he was eventually persuaded by his favourite disciple Ananda to allow women to become its members; the prostitutes were also granted entry to the Samgha. Notwithstanding the Buddha's assertion that nuns could attain spiritual liberation just like a monk, the Buddhists never granted an equal status to them in the mendicant order.

Although Buddhism, and to a lesser extent Jainism, took account of the changes in material life and reacted against Vedic orthodoxy, neither sought to abolish the caste system. In the conflict of interests between brahmanas and kshatriyas, to which is often ascribed the kshatriya origin of Mahavira and Gautama, Buddhism accords the first place to kshatriyas and the second to brahmanas. The Buddhist scriptures argue with consummate skill against brahmanical pretensions and specialized rituals. Buddhism and Jainism adopted a much more liberal attitude towards the lower castes. Not only could members of all the four *varnas* join the Samgha and become monks, but even untouchables like the Chandalas and the Pukkusas could achieve *nirvana*. Matanga, the son of a Chandala, is said to have attained the infinite bliss which many kshatriyas and brahmanas could not achieve. Like Buddha, Mahavira is also believed to have admitted women to his order; the first female disciple of Mahavira is said to have been a captured slave woman. According to an early Jaina text, the number of his women followers were many, though whether or not they

were capable of attaining salvation remained highly controversial among the various Jaina sects in subsequent centuries.

Neither of the two religions sought to debar members of the lower castes from acquiring knowledge. According to them anybody who becomes a teacher deserves respect irrespective of his caste. In a Buddhist birth story a brahmana loses the charm learnt from a Chandala because he denies his teacher out of shame. Consistent with this is an example mentioned in a later Jaina work of a king who while learning spells from a Matanga (Chandala), occupied a lower seat. These stories prove that members of the lower castes often joined the Buddhist and the Jaina orders though they may have done so owing to their poverty.

Buddhist and Jaina tolerance towards the lower sections of society is further borne out by the scriptures of the two sects. A Buddhist monk or nun, in contrast to a brahmana, could approach families of all the four *varnas* for food, or could eat at their houses if invited by them. Similarly an early canonical work permits the Jaina monk to accept food from lower caste families including weavers. But to what extent the practice of the monks and nuns influenced the lay followers of Buddhism and Jainism is a matter of speculation.

The fact that neither slaves nor debtors were admitted to the Buddhist and Jaina church suggests that neither of the two religions sought to challenge existing social relations. In fact both seem to have accepted the caste system. In a Buddhist birth story it is claimed that the Buddhas are born only in the two higher castes and never as vaishya or shudra. Similarly an early text states that the Jaina teachers are not born in low, mean, degraded, poor, indigent or brahmana families. According to some Jaina legends, Mahavira was originally conceived in the womb of a brahmana woman but his embryo was later transferred to that of the noble kshatriya Trishala who gave birth to him. This reveals the intense Jaina hostility towards brahmanas. The remaining categories of people among whom the Jaina teachers are not to be born evidently belong to the lower social orders.

In spite of the protestant character of Buddhism and Jainism neither waged any powerful struggle against caste system and untouchability. On the contrary, Buddhism, like brahmanical religion, seems to have recognized the phenomenon of untouchability, which originated in the post-Vedic period and remains to this day an appalling feature of

Indian social life. The Chandalas and Nishadas, originally aboriginals, were untouchables to the Buddhists. At one place the Buddha himself equates the food earned by unlawful means with the leavings of a Chandala. This is in tune with the attitude of the early brahmanical lawgivers, who prescribed bathing as essential for those members of the higher castes who touched a Chandala. The new religions therefore did not try to abolish the existing social differentiations; they strongly refuted, however, the importance of caste for the attainment of *nirvana*.

Buddhism and Jainism tried to improve the position of slaves in some ways. Whereas Apastamba forbids trade in human beings only for the brahmanas, the new religions prohibit it even for their lay followers. The *Digha Nikaya* advises masters to treat their slaves decently. A Jaina text also states that *dasas* and *dasis*, *karmakaras* and *karmakaris* deserve to be well maintained by their employers. Passages such as these may have generated at least in the Buddhist and the Jaina monks and nuns a feeling of generosity and kindness, which may have added to their following among the lower orders.

CHAPTER 5

The First Territorial States

LIKE RELIGION, contemporary political developments were also deeply rooted in changing material conditions. As has been shown earlier, the tribal political organization of the Rigvedic phase was already giving way to the territorial state towards the end of the Vedic period. But the territorial idea was gradually strengthened in the sixth century BC with the rise of large states with towns as their seats of power. A passage from Panini makes it clear that the people owed allegiance to the *janapada* (territory) to which they belonged. Thus an important feature of political life was the emergence of several territorial states in different parts of the country.

According to the traditional literature sixteen large states (*mahajanapadas*), each comprising several agricultural settlements (*janapadas*), existed in India in the sixth century BC. They are Gandhara, Kamboja, Assaka, Vatsa, Avanti, Shurasena, Chedi, Malla, Kuru, Panchala, Matsya, Vajji (Vrijji), Anga, Kashi, Koshala and Magadha. Kashi was at first the most powerful of them and perhaps played an important part in the subversion of the Videhan monarchy; its capital Varanasi is described in various sources as an important city. According to the *Dasaratha Jataka*, one of the Buddhist birth stories, Rama, whom it describes both as the brother and husband of Sita, was the king of Kashi and not Ayodhya where his modern devotees (*Ramabhaktas*) demolished a medieval mosque leading to a communal holocaust in the country. The economic importance of Kashi lay in the fact that it had emerged as a leading centre of textile manufacture in the time of the Buddha; the *kashaya* (orange brown) robes of the Buddhist monks are said to have been manufactured here.

Koshala was bounded on the west by the river Gomati, on the south by the Sarpika or Syandika (Sai), on the east by the Sadanira (Gandak) which separated it from Videha, and on the north by the Nepal hills. Ayodhya on the Saryu, associated with the Rama story in

the *Ramayana*, Saketa adjoining it and Shravasti (modern Sahet-Mahet) on the borders of the Gonda and Bahraich districts of Uttar Pradesh, were three important Koshalan cities, though excavations indicate that none of them was settled on any considerable scale before the sixth century BC.

Anga on the east of Magadha was separated from it by the river Champa and comprised the modern districts of Munger and Bhagalpur. Its capital Champa, on the bank of the river of the same name, was noted for its wealth and commerce.

Between Anga and Vatsa there lay the kingdom of Magadha corresponding to modern Patna and Gaya districts, bounded on the north and west by the rivers Ganga and Sone, on the south by the Vindhya outcrop and on the east by the river Champa. Brahmanical texts make derogatory references to Magadha and its people because the Magadhans did not follow the *varna* system and did not practise the rituals prescribed by them. This was in sharp contrast to the attitude of the Buddhists who attach great importance to this area. The Magadhan rulers Bimbisara and Ajatashatru were the Buddha's friends and disciples. Gaya was the place of the Buddha's enlightenment and Rajagriha was one of his favourite haunts. Rendered impregnable by a perimeter of five hills, Rajagriha, also known as Girivraja, was the Magadhan capital.

The Vajji territory lay north of the Ganga and stretched as far as the Nepal hills. Its western limit was the river Sadanira (Gandak), which separated it from Malla and Koshala. In the east it extended up to the forests on the banks of the river Koshi and Mahananda. The Vajji state is said to have been a confederation of eight clans (*atthakula*), of whom the Videhans, the Lichchhavis, the Jnatrikas and the Vrijjis proper were the most important. In all likelihood the Vajji confederation took form after the decline and fall of the Videhan monarchy and was a flourishing non-monarchical state in the time of Mahavira and Gautama Buddha.

The territory of the non-monarchical Mallas, supposed to have been ruled by five hundred chiefs, was divided into two parts, each having its own capital. The two capital cities were Kushinara (identified with Kasia in Gorakhpur district), and Pava, possibly identical with Pawapuri in Patna district. The Mallas, like the Videhans, had at first a monarchical constitution, which was replaced by what has generally

been described as a republican polity. Literary writings refer to some kind of alliance between the Mallas, the Lichchhavis and the clan lords of Kashi-Koshala. The league may have been directed against the rising power of Magadha.

The kingdom of the Chedis corresponded roughly to the eastern parts of Bundelkhand and adjoining areas, and their king lists occur in the Buddhist birth stories. Shishupala was a Chedi ruler and the famous enemy of Krishna. Both figure in the *Mahabharata*, the latter being the most prominent among its dramatis personae. The slaying of the former became the central theme of a long poem by a later poet, Magha.

The Shurasena kingdom, with its capital at Mathura, was inhospitable because of 'uneven roads, excessive dust, vicious talks and *yakshas* (demons)' The *Mahabharata* and the Puranas refer to the ruling family of Mathura as belonging to the Yadava clan with which is also associated the epic hero Krishna who later emerged as India's most interesting god from the numerous layers of contradictory myths that grew around him in course of time.

Kuru, Panchala and Matsya were the three tribal polities whose existence is traceable to the preceding period. The Kurus settled in the region of Delhi-Meerut, and allied with the Panchalas; their trade centre is said to have been visited by the Buddha. A branch of the Panchalas had a capital at Kampilla, perhaps modern Kampil in Farrukhabad district. Not much information is available about the Matsyas, who are traditionally associated with modern Jaipur-Bharatpur-Alwar region of Rajasthan; it was more suitable for cattle rearing.

Kamboja and Gandhara were farthest away from Magadha. The first lay in Afghanistan; the second extended up to the Kabul valley with Taxila as its leading city. According to the Buddhist tradition the Gandhara king Pukkusati exchanged gifts with Bimbisara in Magadha and went on foot to see the Buddha. A little before 530 BC, Cyrus, the Achaemenid emperor of Persia, crossed the Hindukush and received tributes from the people of Kamboja, Gandhara and the trans-Indus area. According to the Greek historian Herodotus Gandhara formed the twentieth province of the Achaemenid empire and was the most populous and wealthy; it supplied men and material to the Persian army fighting against the Greeks.

THE MAHAJANAPADAS

INDEX

MAHAJANAPADA — ANGA

ANCIENT CITY ●

MODERN TOWN O

NATIONAL BOUNDARY

KAMBOJA
Charsada
Taxila
Srinagar
GANDHARA
Indus R.
KURU
PANCHALA
Indraprastha
Hastinapur
Lumbini
KOSALA
SHURASENA
Shravasti
Virat
Mathura
MATSYA
Sohagaura
MALLAS
VAJJI
Vaisali
VATSA
KASHI
Ganga R.
ANGA
Bangarh
Mahasthan
Brahmaputra R.
Kaushambi
MAGADHA
Varanasi
Rajgir
Champa
AVANTI
CHEDI
Bharukaccha
Ujjain
Vidisa
Eran
Tamluk
Calcutta
Chandraketugarh
Sisupalgarh
Bombay
ASMAKA
ARABIAN SEA
Godavari R.
BAY OF BENGAL
Krishna R.
Madras
Cauvery R.
LAKSHADWEEP (India)
ANDAMAN and NICOBAR ISLANDS (India)
SCALE
500 km.
300 miles
Anuradhapur
INDIAN OCEAN
N
W
E
S

The territory of the Assakas (Ashmakas) was situated on the banks of the river Godavari near modern Paithan in Maharashtra. It became commercially important in course of time. The state of Avanti lay in central Malwa and the adjoining areas of Madhya Pradesh. Divided into two parts, its southern capital was Mahishmati and its northern Ujjain, which became more important of the two. The Avanti king Pradyota is famous in legends, according to which from an enemy he became father-in-law of Udayan, who ruled over the Vatsa kingdom.

The Vatsa capital lay 64 km from Allahabad at Kaushambi (modern Kosam) on the bank of the Yamuna. Kaushambi and Ujjain were connected by a major trade route, and they must have benefited from the north-Indian trade.

All the sixteen *mahajanapadas* did not play the same role in contemporary politics. Kashi, which was most important at first, lost its position to Koshala and Magadha. These two kingdoms vied with each other for control of the Ganga basin, which, owing to the riverine commercial traffic, had certain clear strategic and economic advantages. In the sixth century BC only four states—Kashi, Koshala, Magadha and the Vajjian confederacy—remained important. They fought for political hegemony for nearly a hundred years. Eventually Magadha emerged victorious and became the centre of political activity in north India.

The first important ruler of Magadha was Bimbisara who ascended the throne in the second half of the sixth century BC. Although Bimbisara was a patron of Buddhism, his lineage is not discussed in Buddhist sources. He is described as Seniya, 'with an army', being perhaps the first king to have a regular standing army.

Pasenadi (Prasenajit), the king of Koshala, claimed descent from Ikshvaku, who is known in Vedic sources; but his claim was not recognized by other princes. The story goes that he asked for a Shakyan girl in marriage. Although the Shakyans were under his suzerainty, they were embarrassed because of their claim to have descended from Ikshvaku. Finally, however, the Shakyans cheated the Koshalan king by sending the beautiful Vasabhakhattiya, daughter of Mahanama Shakya by a slave woman Nagamunda, which name might suggest an aboriginal origin from the Naga tribe. But the son of this union Vidudabha remained heir-apparent to the Koshalan kingdom.

The kings of Magadha and Koshala started as relatively unaggressive

rulers; both patronized the new religious preachers and entered into a matrimonial alliance between themselves. Prasenajit's sister was the wife of Bimbisara, who received a Kashi village as dowry; some accounts refer to the former's daughter as the wife of the latter's son. Bimbisara arranged marriages with several other royal houses of the time. He married Chellana, the daughter of the Lichchhavi chief Chetaka. Khema, another wife of the king, was a daughter of the king of Madra. Dynastic marriages promoted goodwill between Bimbisara and contemporary rulers, and thus strengthened his position. Bimbisara also tried to win the friendship of Pradyota, the king of Avanti, for whose medical assistance he sent his personal physician Jivaka to Ujjain. The only *mahajanapada* which was a victim of Bimbisara's aggression was Anga; it was annexed to Magadha. The friendly relations that subsisted between Magadha and Koshala left their rulers free to fight the tribes which lived in the forest region of the two kingdoms.

The beginning of the conflict between Koshala and Magadha took place in the time of Ajatashatru, who out of ambition to become king, imprisoned his father in a dungeon and then killed him; the latter was soon joined in death by his Koshalan wife who could not bear the shock of her husband's murder. Reacting to this, Prasenajit revoked the gift of the Kashi village, which had formed part of his sister's dowry and whose importance lay not in its revenue but in its trade potential. Therefore war took place between Ajatashatru and Prasenajit. Several battles were fought without lasting success for either. Ultimately Prasenajit was betrayed by his own minister Dirghacharayana, who handed the royal insignia to Prasenajit's son and the military command to Vidudabha, while the king was busy with his final visit to the Buddha. The fugitive ruler, accompanied by a servant woman, reached Rajagriha one night after the gates had been shut and died of exhaustion. Ajatashatru gave him a state funeral and, being his nephew, claimed his kingdom in the bargain as it were! Vidudabha along with his army was drowned by an untimely flood in the river Rapti, and the Koshala kingdom was annexed to Magadha without a battle.

Ajatashatru opposed the tribal confederacy of the Vajjis, headed by the Lichchhavis of Vaishali. This was part of the general monarchical antagonism against the tribal polities. Vidudabha had already waged a

direct war on the Shakyans and bathed his throne in Shakyan blood. It was left to Ajatashatru to destroy the power of the Lichchhavis. The Mallas, Lichchhavis, and similar tribes were great impediments in the growth of monarchy, whose real strength lay in well-organized standing armies which had no tribal character. The immediate pretext of the war was that the traders complained of double imposts collected by the Lichchhavis and by the Magadhan king, both claiming full control of the river Ganga. The first step was the setting up of a fortified stockade at Pataliputra (Patna) at the confluence of three rivers, the Ganga, Sone and Gandak, which in the time of Ajatashatru became the capital of Magadha. A brahmana minister Vassakara, sent by Ajatashatru to sow internal discord among the Lichchhavis, succeeded in setting one tribal chief against the other by encouraging each chief to claim more than his due. The oligarchs were made to neglect tribal meetings, collective military drill and the tribal judicial assembly, which completely undermined tribal solidarity. When the situation was ripe Vassakara sent word to Ajatashatru, who marched into Vaishali to gain an easy victory. Details of the defeat and destruction of the Mallas are not known; but they were soon ruined. However, the fall of the Lichchhavis must not be attributed only to internal dissensions engineered by an individual minister. The tribe decayed under the influence of wealth collected through taxes and tribute, and retained as private property by the oligarchs. Tribal life was disrupted before Ajatashatru's agent was sent on commission. The rise of such an outstanding religious teacher as Mahavira among the Lichchhavis, and the seeking of employment by the two Mallas, Bandhula and Karayan, with the king of Koshala suggest that tribal life had already ceased to give satisfaction to the ablest members of the tribe. This is also indicated by the story of the famous physician Jivaka. Found as an abandoned child in a street of Rajagriha, he later went as far as Taxila to study medicine and on his return became the private physician of Bimbisara, who used to send him to look after the Buddha; he became affluent enough to give gifts to Buddhist monks.

Through his conquests Ajatashatru extended the frontiers of the Magadhan kingdom and laid the foundations of what later became an empire. But much was left for his successors to do. The *Majjhima Nikaya* makes a passing reference to the Avanti king Pradyota's intention

to invade Magadha, which prompted Ajatashatru to refortify Rajagriha. But Avanti, with its capital at Ujjain, was annexed to the Magadhan kingdom after Ajatashatru. The Vatsa king Udayana is known for his quarrel with Pradyota of Ujjain and for the cycle of romance relating to him and his queen Vasavadatta, later immortalized by Bhasa, one of ancient India's foremost dramatists. But nothing is known about the amalgamation of Vatsa with Magadha. The Purus, Shurasenas and Matsyas, tribal states of Vedic origin, did not last beyond the fourth century BC.

Ajatashatru died in 461 BC. One who had killed his father to seize the throne, he was succeeded by five kings who all, according to the Ceylonese Buddhist chronicle *Mahavamsa*, ascended the throne after killing their fathers. The accession of five parricides in quick succession roused the indignation of the people, who perhaps deposed the last in 413 BC, and made Shishunaga, a viceroy at Banaras, the king. The Shishunaga dynasty ruled for half a century and finally gave way to the usurper Mahapadma Nanda, whose dynasty ruled until 321 BC.

According to some sources Mahapadma, the founder of the dynasty, was the son of a shudra mother. Other sources suggest that he was born of the union of a barber with a courtesan. In any case it remains true that the Nandas were the first of a number of non-kshatriya ruling dynasties. Mahapadma himself is described later in Puranas as the destroyer of all the kshatriyas. He is also credited with the final overthrow of the contemporary royal houses. The Nandas, therefore, are sometimes described as the first empire builders of India. They inherited the large kingdom of Magadha and extended it to yet more distant frontiers through their fabulous wealth and a vast army consisting of 20,000 cavalry, 200,000 infantry, 2000 chariots and 3000 elephants. That the Nandas controlled some parts of Kalinga (Orissa) is borne out by the Hathigumpha inscription of king Kharavela, assigned to the middle of the first century BC. Parts of the Deccan may also have formed part of the Magadhan empire. Several Mysore inscriptions of the twelfth century indicate that the southern portion of the Kuntala region in Mahārashtra was under the Nanda control, but these late records may not be reliable. Although the actual boundary of the empire of the Nandas is difficult to determine, of all the *mahajanapadas* which flourished in the sixth century BC, Magadha emerged as the most powerful.

The first phase of the expansion and consolidation of the Magadhan empire was over by the reign of Mahapadma Nanda. At about the same time Alexander of Macedon defeated Darius III, the last Achaemenid emperor, and proceeded to conquer the whole of his empire. After a long campaign in Bactria, situated on the borders of the erstwhile USSR and Afghanistan, Alexander crossed the Hindukush and in 327 BC entered north-western India which had been an Achaemenid province. Ambhi (Omphis), the king of Taxila (Takshashila), submitted to Alexander in 327 BC. Porus, who ruled over the territory between the Jhelum and the Ravi, resisted his advance, but was defeated and captured. Later Alexander, impressed by Porus, reinstated him in power, and at the time of his return from India left him in charge of the Panjab. Alexander then conquered the tribal republican territory of the Glauganikai (Glachukayanaka) with its thirty-seven towns.

As is clear from the Greek historians, such tribes as the Aspasioi (Asvayana), Assakenoi (Ashmakas), Kathaioi (Kathas), Malloi (Malava), Oxydrakai (Kshudrakas), Sibai (Sivis) and Agalassoi (Arjunayanas?) put up strong resistance against Alexander; the Adraistai (Adrishtas or Arattas; Arashtraka kingless), Ambasthas and Kathaioi (kshatriya) chose not to fight. In the battle with Aspasioi, Alexander was seriously wounded, but he crushed them. As many as 40,000 are said to have been taken prisoner from among them. Also 200,000 oxen were taken away by Alexander. Similarly, the entire body of 7000 troops belonging to the Assakenoi was done to death. The Kathaioi could not win; their casualties amounted to 17,000 killed and 70,000 captured. The most determined opposition to Alexander was organized by a confederacy of tribes led by the Malloi (Malavas) and the Oxydrakai (Kshudrakas). Alexander, while scaling the wall of a Malava stronghold, was seriously injured by a long arrow. The infuriated Macedonian soldiers massacred all the inhabitants; the Kshudrakas, disheartened by the Malava defeat, submitted. The Greek campaign in north-western India lasted two years, after which Alexander's soldiers laid down their arms and refused to go further east. An encounter between the Macedonian mercenaries and the large army of the Nandas of Magadha was thus avoided.

Alexander established in India a number of Greek settlements, some of which may have survived until the time of Ashoka and even

later. The important ones among them were the city of Alexandria in the Kabul region, Boukephala, possibly on the eastern bank of the Jhelum, and Alexandria in Sindh. The march of the army from mainland Greece to India opened up land routes, which promoted trade in subsequent centuries. But the immediate effect of Alexander's whirlwind expedition was the destruction of several tribes. Smaller kingdoms merged into the bigger ones. The process of political unification was unleashed. A few years later Chandragupta Maurya took advantage of the void created by Alexander's departure and amalgamated all the tribal states of north-western India under Magadhan suzerainty.

Why of all the *janapadas* Magadha alone came into prominence and became the seat of a powerful monarchy and the nucleus of an extensive empire is an interesting question. It would be superficial and puerile to ascribe the rise and expansion of Magadha solely to the abilities and ambitions of such individual rulers as Bimbisara, Ajatashatru and Mahapadma Nanda. Even though both Ajatashatru and Mahapadma were succeeded by incompetent rulers, Magadha continued to grow in strength and extent. There were certain deeper causes of the success of Magadha. Its favourable geographical position enabled it to control the whole lower Gangetic plain, and its rich alluvial soil provided a strong agricultural base. The thick forests beyond Gaya in south Bihar supplied timber for buildings and elephants for the army. What is probably most important is that Magadha controlled the supply of the richest deposits of copper and iron ores available to the south-east in the hills beyond Gaya. This rendered possible the manufacture of better weapons and implements which were systematically used to clear the land and bring it under the plough. Magadha could thus also improve its military technology, as is proved by the use of superior weapons of war against Vaishali.

Rajagriha, which remained the capital of Magadha up to the time of Ajatashatru, was surrounded by an easily defended perimeter of hills fortified with cyclopean walls of 40 km in length. It had an excellent supply of water from hot and cold streams and could resist enemy attack indefinitely. Initially, Magadha was not suitably placed on the trade route. But the shift of the capital to Pataliputra gave it control over the river traffic. All these factors account for the expansion and stability of Magadha, which gradually swallowed the other contemporary states.

The rapid development and consolidation of the pre-Maurya states owed a great deal to the land taxes, which became a substantial and permanent source of income for the exchequer. *Bali*, originally a voluntary tribute, became obligatory. New taxes such as *bhaga* and *kara*, both unheard of in the earlier period, seem to have become a source of state income. The fertility of soil in the Gangetic valley and the rise of a new class of rich peasant proprietors who were in a position to pay taxes contributed to the growth of revenues. Peasants were taxed even in earlier times, but now we find new tax-paying classes of artisans and traders. According to the lawbooks the artisans had to work one day a month for the king, and the traders had to pay taxes on sales to a toll officer known as the *shaulkika* or *shulkadhyaksha*.

The state treasury was further replenished by some oppressive taxation measures. At least two types of officers, *tundiyas* and *akasiyas*, are described in the Jataka stories as collecting taxes from the people, either by beating and binding them or by dispossessing them of their earnings. Although the details of the tax-collecting machinery are not known, we have references to the Nanda kings enriching themselves by raising taxes from the people. The Ceylonese chronicle of the fifth century AD refers to one Ugrasena of Magadha who accumulated wealth to the tune of 80 *kotis* through indiscreet fund-raising measures. The Buddhist birth stories mention no less than half a dozen revenue officers, as against only one tax collector known as the *bhagadugha* (milcher of the cow) in the later Vedic period.

Connected with the growth of the taxation system was the development of the state machinery. The post-Vedic period witnessed the earliest appearance of the royal advisers or ministers. Vassakara of Magadha and Dirghacharayana of Koshala are known to have been effective ministers with great political influence. In the countryside local administration was entrusted to village headman, whose office grew out of the leadership of the tribal militia, for the *gramani* means the head of *grama* or tribe. In the age of the Buddha, when tribal life was at a discount, the *gramani* became the administrative head of the village and came to be known by several names, e.g. *gramyadhyaksha*, *gramani* or *gramika*. Reference to 80,000 *gramikas* in the time of Bimbisara is found in Buddhist literature, though the figure obviously is an inflated one. At any rate it is clear that the administrative machinery was becoming complex and the power of the state strong.

The real and most effective prop of the state organization was the standing army, which may be traced back to the earlier period and whose growth was promoted by socio-economic developments in the age of the Buddha. With the decline of tribal life and the corresponding division of society into caste-classes the tribal militia was naturally replaced by the standing army, whose importance was duly recognized in this period. The *senanayaka* occupied an exalted place in the list of high functionaries. The Nanda ruler of Magadha is reported to have kept 20,000 cavalry, 200,000 infantry, 2000 four-horsed chariots and 3000 to 6000 elephants at the time of Alexander's invasion. Although the large army of the Nandas may have been financed by the enormous wealth for which they are traditionally famous, this cannot legitimately be said of all the other states (*mahajanapadas*) of the time. The development of the standing army was facilitated in most of the *mahajanapadas* only by a fiscal system which came to be somewhat firmly established in post-Vedic times.

A legal and judicial system, an important weapon of coercion in the hands of any ruling class, originated in this period. In a society divided into castes, the old egalitarian tribal law was found obsolete. Therefore the brahmanical thinkers defined the duty of each caste, and imposed social, economic and political disabilities on the shudras; they also laid down injunctions undermining the position of women. All this is amply reflected in the civil and criminal laws formulated by the early brahmanical lawbooks. The gradual substitution of the new laws based on the *varna* system for the tribal law also partially explains the absence of the *sabha* and *samiti*, the Vedic popular assemblies, which were tribal in character.

The *sabha* and *samiti* had begun to lose their importance towards the end of the Vedic period; now they seem to have been replaced by caste associations, which, however, restricted their activities to the social sphere. The tribal assemblies could not fit into the organizational framework of the large territorial states of the sixth century BC; nor could they be resilient enough to accommodate the non-Aryan aboriginals who lived in the new kingdoms. Thus, whereas the *samiti* of the Panchalas is mentioned in later Vedic texts, no reference to the popular assemblies of their successors is available. On the other hand the brahmanical lawbooks of the period provide for a new body, the *parishad*, consisting exclusively of brahmanas.

These developments were mostly confined to the monarchical states, which were concentrated in the fertile Gangetic plain. These states were different from the so-called republics (*gana*), which flourished in the modern Panjab, where they may have been survivals of the early Vedic tribes, and in the periphery of the Gangetic kingdoms or the less fertile Himalayan foothills. The origin of the territorial republics in the sub-Himalayan region has been traced to the reaction against the pattern of life that evolved in the later Vedic period. The movement against Vedic institutions was aimed at the abolition of the growing class and sex distinctions and directed against the acceptance of religious practices which took a heavy toll of cattle-stock. It was also directed against the hereditary kingship bolstered by the brahmanas, who arrogated to themselves all the rights and privileges to the exclusion of all the other sections of society.

The new movement against Vedic orthodoxy derived inspiration from traditions about the remote past when there were no *varna* distinctions, no domination by the upper classes on the lower ones and no coercive oppression of the people by hereditary kings. This perhaps explains the legends according to which republics replaced monarchies. The traditional story of the origin of the Shakyas, to which tribe the Buddha belonged, tells us that they had descended from the royal house of Koshala. We are told that four brothers and their four sisters were expelled by their royal father; so they went to the Himalayan foothills and resolved to preserve the purity of their race by marrying among themselves. The account clearly indicates that the founders of republics broke away from the parent stock and moved to new areas. This may have been the case with Videha and Vaishali, which are referred to as monarchies transformed into republics.

The tendency to break away from monarchies can be attributed to the socio-political conditions of the period. In the early period members of ruling elites obtained a portion of the booty of war and tributes collected from the vanquished. But in subsequent times, when the victorious tribal chiefs came to occupy prominent and hereditary royal positions in the territorial states, they claimed all revenues for themselves. The leading members of the tribe resented the situation, and demanded the right to collect taxes from the

peasants and the right to bear arms and maintain their own army. The reaction gave birth to a political framework that has been glorified by modern historians as being republican and democratic.

The central feature of the 'republican' government was its seemingly corporate character. The representatives of the tribes and the heads of families may have sat in the public assembly (*santhagara*) of the capital. The tribal assembly was presided over by one of the representatives called the *raja* or *senapati*. In a later Buddhist story Simha, in spite of being the youngest son of *senapati* Khanda, was allowed to succeed his father to office. When Simha wanted to step aside in favour of his eldest brother, the members of the assembly plainly told him that the office did not belong to his family but to the assembly of the tribe. This indicates that the office of the chief executive of the tribal state was not hereditary, and he was more a chief than a king. All important issues were placed before the assembly, and no decision was taken in the absence of unanimity among members. This has given rise to the much trumpeted notion of some historians that non-monarchical states of the post-Vedic period were truly democratic in character.

In point of fact the assemblies were dominated by oligarchs. The absence of monarchy did not really mean the prevalence of democracy in the true sense of the term. Members of the assembly belonged mostly to the kshatriya caste, and at least in the case of the Lichchhavis it is known that most non-kshatriyas, slaves and wage labourers had no place there. This proves that the republican system was in essence oligarchical. The elder members of the aristocratic families (*rajakulas*) formed the core of the assembly; in one case the *rajakulas* are credited with the right of declaring war. Members of the republican assembly bore the title *raja* or king. The head of the state was a *senapati*, the term denoting commander of the army in the monarchical system. Even the officers of the republics bore the same titles as their counterparts in the contemporary monarchies. Such common terms as *mahamatta* (*mahamatya*) and *amachchha* (*amatya*) were used to describe officers both in the republics and the kingdoms. This proves that post-Vedic republics were greatly influenced by the monarchies of the time.

The strict control which non-monarchical governments exercised over their domains through executive edicts and legislation expose their undemocratic character. A Buddhist narrative tells us that on

the occasion of the Buddha's visit to the city of Pava the Mallas issued a decree that a general welcome should be given to him, and enforced it by the penalty of a heavy fine for default. This anticipates the authoritarianism and centralized monarchical governance associated with the Maurya kings who ruled over large parts of the country in the subsequent period. If credence is given to a Jataka story, there was a ban among the Shakyas on the marriage of a girl even with a king of supposedly low status; nor was it permitted for people of unequal birth to dine together. Similarly the *gana* of Vaishali is said to have formulated a rule which related to the marriage of girls in different wards of the city. The laws enacted by the 'republican' states to control the private and family life of individual members of society are no better than those evolved by the brahmana authors of the Dharmasutras. The republics could not do away with the essential organizational and ideological features of the monarchies. The governments of the Lichchhavis, Shakyas and Mallas possessed all the paraphernalia of a monarchical state apparatus. They could not rise above the level of 'distorted republics', and succumbed to Magadha, which established its political hegemony after a long and bitter struggle with contemporary states.

CHAPTER 6

The First Empire

AFTER THE OVERTHROW of the Nanda dynasty at Magadha the Mauryas came to prominence. The history of their rule is rendered comparatively reliable on account of evidence obtained from a variety of sources. The Buddhist and Jaina traditions, the early Dharmashastra texts and the material retrieved from archaeological excavations continue to remain important bases of historical reconstruction. In addition, several new sources of information are available for the history of the Mauryas. The *Arthashastra* of Kautilya, for example, has considerable bearing on the developments during their rule. Its date has been a matter of debate; a computer analysis of the text discerns no less than three different styles in it and suggests that its composition may have stretched over several centuries. Nevertheless there is a general consensus among scholars that certain portions of the work (Books II, III and IV) have a genuine Maurya touch about them and may be taken as its original kernel. The Greek account called *Indika* written by Megasthenes is another authentic source. Though available only in fragments, it shows correspondence with the Kautilyan text at many places. The most authentic Maurya records however remain the first decipherable inscriptions issued by Ashoka. Found at 45 places on the highways in the Indian subcontinent and Afghanistan, in 181 versions, they were composed in Prakrit language and written in Brahmi script in greater part of the Maurya empire, though in its north-western part they appear in Aramaic and Kharoshthi scripts. In Afghanistan, however, they are written in both Aramaic and Greek scripts and languages. The Puranas, belonging as they do to a much later period, have much less claim to authenticity in the absence of corroborative historical material.

Chandragupta, the founder of the Maurya dynasty, succeeded to the Nanda throne in about 321 BC at the age of twenty-five. Indian tradition has it that the brahmana Kautilya, also known as Chanakya

or Vishnugupta, was his mentor and guide. The origin and early life of Chandragupta remain obscure, though according to the prevalent view he belonged to the Moriya tribe and his caste was low. The older theory of his base birth is no longer acceptable to most historians. Both Indian and classical Greek sources state that he overthrew the last Nanda ruler and occupied his capital Pataliputra, modern Patna. The Greek accounts add that he moved to north-west India and subdued the Greek garrisons left behind by Alexander.

Soon, however, Seleukos Nikator gained control of most Asiatic provinces of the Macedonian empire, and in 305 BC he seems to have met Chandragupta in battle. They signed a treaty and entered into a marriage alliance. Who married whose daughter is not quite clear but it seems that Chandragupta probably made a gift of 500 elephants to the Greek general and obtained territory across the Indus. Seleukos' ambassador Megasthenes lived for many years at the Maurya court at Pataliputra and travelled extensively in the country. According to Jaina sources, Chandragupta embraced Jainism towards the end of his life and stepped down from the throne in favour of his son. Accompanied by Bhadrabahu, a Jaina saint, and several other monks, he is said to have gone to Sravana Belgola near Mysore, where he deliberately starved himself to death in the approved Jaina fashion.

In 297 BC Chandragupta was succeeded by his son Bindusara, known to the Greeks as Amitrochates (Sanskrit, *Amitraghata* = the destroyer of foes). He is said to have had contacts with Antiochus I, the Seleucid king of Syria. A man of wide tastes and interests, he requested Antiochus to send him some sweet wine, dried figs and a Sophist; the last being not meant for export, however, could not be sent. According to the Tibetan Buddhist monk Taranatha, who visited India in the sixteenth century, Bindusara conquered 'the land between the two seas' This has been taken to mean that he annexed to the Magadhan kingdom the peninsular region of India. Early Tamil literature, it has been pointed out, also mentions the Maurya invasion of the far south. But this does not adequately justify the assumption that Bindusara annexed the southernmost part of India to the Maurya empire. Nevertheless it is probable that his kingdom extended in the south up to Mysore region. Kalinga (modern Orissa), on the eastern coast, however, remained hostile and was conquered in the succeeding reign by Bindusara's son Ashoka.

Nearly a hundred years ago Askoka was merely a shadowy Maurya king mentioned in the Puranas. In 1837 James Prinsep deciphered an inscription in Brahmi script referring to a king called Devanama Piyadassi (beloved of the gods). Later many more similar inscriptions were discovered. Initially these records could not be attributed to Ashoka. But in 1915 was discovered another inscription which speaks of Ashoka Piyadassi. This, corroborated by the Ceylonese chronicle *Mahavamsa*, established that Ashoka, the Maurya monarch, was the Devanamapiya Piyadassi of the inscriptions.

According to Buddhist sources Ashoka usurped the throne after killing all rival claimants and began his reign as a tyrant, though this remains unsubstantiated by his inscriptions. The most important event of Ashoka's reign seems to have been his conversion to Buddhism after his victorious war with Kalinga in 260 BC. The horror of the war as described in the Emperor's own words is possibly an overstatement: 'a hundred and fifty thousand people were deported, a hundred thousand were killed and many more died Some scholars would have us believe that Ashoka, moved by the untold miseries caused by the war, dramatically embraced Buddhism. But according to one of his inscriptions, it was only after a period of two and half years that he became an enthusiastic supporter of the religion of the Buddha. Under its influence he eventually foreswore conquest by war and replaced it with conquest by piety (*dhammaghosha*). The Buddhist church was reorganized during his reign, with the meeting of the third Buddhist council at Pataliputra in 250 BC under the chairmanship of Mogalliputta Tissa. This was followed by the despatch of missionaries to south India, Ceylon, Burma and other countries to propagate Buddhism. Ashoka's own records do not suggest his association with the Buddhist council convened during his rule. His edicts, however, prove his relationship with the Buddhist church as well as his own firm belief in Buddhism. But there is little basis for the view that Ashoka ever donned the robes of a Buddhist monk.

The first three Mauryas were responsible for the unification of a large part of the country under their political hegemony. Nearly all of north India had been already brought under Magadhan control by Chandragupta; the evidence from epigraphy and the Ceylonese chronicles indicate that Bengal had also become part of the Magadhan empire in the early Maurya period. Indirect evidence cited earlier

may imply that a major portion of the south Indian peninsula came under Maurya influence during the time of Bindusara; Kalinga was subjugated by Ashoka. Reference to such southern peoples as the Cholas, Pandyas, Satyaputras and Keralaputras is found in the epigraphs of Ashoka, but his relationship with them was probably friendly. Judging from the provenance of the Ashokan edicts, Maurya influence did not extend beyond Mysore in the south and Kandahar in the west. According to tradition Kashmir was a part of the Maurya empire and Ashoka built the city of Shrinagara. The Maurya state thus seems to have exercised its influence over a vast territory. It is likely that under its impact the process of state formation in remote areas of the country, especially the Deccan and the far south, was accelerated.

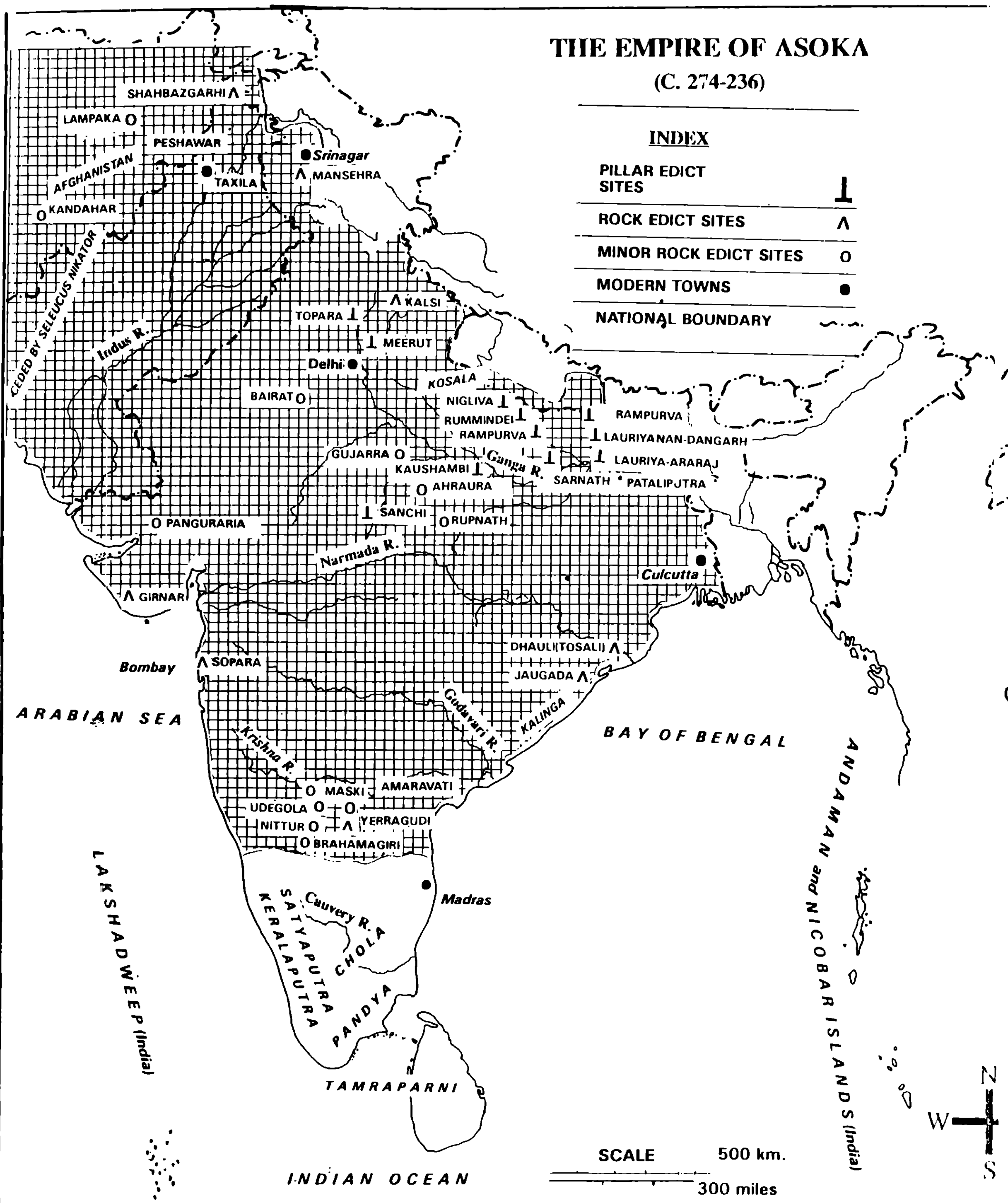
The Mauryas maintained friendly relations with several contemporary powers. Bindusara's request to Antiochus has already been referred to. Ashoka is said to have given his daughter in marriage to a Nepalese nobleman and appears to have had very close connections with Nepal. The Tibetan sources also refer to his visit to Khotan in Central Asia, but the evidence is suspect. It is likely, however, that Ashoka sent his missions to the region, though evidence for Sino-Indian contact in the Mauryan period is wanting. In one of his edicts Ashoka mentions Antiochus Theos of Syria (260-246 BC), the grandson of Seleukos Nikator, Ptolemy III Philadelphus of Egypt (285-247 BC), Antigonus Gonatus of Macedonia (279-239 BC), Magas of Cyrene, and Alexander of Epirus—all kings of the contemporary Hellenic world—with whom he exchanged missions. The Ceylonese tradition furnishes ample indication of the extremely cordial relationship existing between the Mauryas and Ceylon. Ashoka is said to have sent his son Mahendra to Ceylon as a Buddhist missionary though the visit of his daughter there to preach Buddhism is questionable. Tissa, the contemporary king of the island, derived much inspiration from Ashoka. Friendly political relationship with foreign rulers promoted commerce and communications with the outside world as well as exchange of ideas.

The Mauryas achieved political supremacy over the whole of India (except the extreme south) with the help of a huge army. No other ruling house in ancient India maintained a larger army. According to Plutarch and Justin, Chandragupta Maurya overran the

whole of India with 600,000 men, which is thrice the number of the infantry of the Nandas. Megasthenes puts the total number of the Maurya army at 400,000. There may be a degree of exaggeration in these figures; but even so it is not possible to deny the tremendous increase in the military strength and coercive power of the state which seem to have enhanced the prestige and glamour of the Maurya king.

In the Kautilyan scheme royal order supersedes all other sources of authority including *dharma*, which could be interpreted by the king in the changing contexts of time. Indisputable proof of the all-embracing power of the king is furnished by the Ashokan edicts, which sought to regulate even the social and religious life of the people. The state tried to control all spheres of life through its vast bureaucracy. Kautilya mentions 18 *tirthas*, who are probably called *mahamatras* or high functionaries. He also provides for 27 super-intendents concerned mostly with economic functions; some of them also performed military duties. Further, he refers to the duties of the *gopa, sthanika, dharmastha, nagaraka*, etc. How far the *Arthashastra* provisions were actually put into practice is difficult to ascertain. But there is little doubt that the administrative requirements prompted the Mauryas to increase the number of officers in their employ. All this, together with the growing importance of the warrior class from pre-Maurya times, may have led to the exaltation of royal power.

The governance of the vast territory with the help of an expanding bureaucracy and a huge standing army involved heavy expenditure. New and permanent sources of income to the imperial exchequer, therefore, had to be found. This seems to have been the guiding principle of the Maurya state in undertaking and regulating numerous economic activities which brought it profit. It founded new settlements and sought to rehabilitate the decaying ones by moving people out of overpopulated regions. The shudras for the first time were aided by the state to settle as farmers in these settlements. They were either enticed away from other places or deported from areas where population density was high. Deportation of 150,000 people after the Kalinga war was apparently in keeping with the Maurya policy of founding new settlements. In order to bring virgin soil under the plough, the shudra settlers were granted fiscal exemptions or concessions by way of the supply of cattle, seeds and money in the hope of future repayment.



THE EMPIRE OF ASOKA
(C. 274-236)
INDEX
PILLAR EDICT SITES
ROCK EDICT SITES
MINOR ROCK EDICT SITES
MODERN TOWNS
NATIONAL BOUNDARY
SHAHBAZGARHI
LAMPAKA
PESHAWAR
Srinagar
MANSEHRA
AFGHANISTAN
TAXILA
KANDAHAR
CEDED BY SELEUCUS NIKATOR
Indus R.
KALSI
TOPARA
MEERUT
Delhi
KOSALA
BAIRAT
NIGLIVA
RUMMINDEI
RAMPURVA
RAMPURVA
LAURIYANAN-DANGARH
GUJARRA
KAUSHAMBI
Ganga R.
LAURIYA-ARARAJ
SARNATH
PATALIPUTRA
AHRAURA
SANCHI
RUPNATH
PANGURARIA
Narmada R.
Culcutta
GIRNAR
DHAULI(TOSALI)
Bombay
SOPARA
JAUGADA
ARABIAN SEA
Godavari R.
KALINGA
BAY OF BENGAL
Krishna R.
MASKI
AMARAVATI
UDEGOLA
NITTUR
YERRAGUDI
BRAHAMAGIRI
ANDAMAN and NICOBAR ISLANDS (India)
Madras
LAKSHADWEEP (India)
SATYAPUTRA
KERALAPUTRA
Cauvery R.
CHOLA
PANDYA
TAMRAPARNI
N
W
S
SCALE
500 km.
300 miles
INDIAN OCEAN

In the newly settled areas, which formed the crown land or crown village (*sitą*), land was granted to retired village officials and priests; but it could not be sold, mortgaged or inherited. Even ordinary peasants could not reassign their land to non-taxpayers. Failure on the part of the farmers to cultivate the land might lead to its transfer to someone else. Restrictions on the populations of crown villages were doubtless severe, and escape from them was difficult. One could not become an ascetic without passing the age of procreation. Taking to asceticism without providing for one's wife and other dependants was a punishable offence; so was converting a woman to asceticism. Ascetics were not permitted entry into the newly-settled crown villages. Associations or groups could not be formed by members of the lower orders. Public entertainment was prohibited; for actors, dancers, singers, musicians, reconteurs and bards would presumably disturb agricultural operations in the newly colonized areas. The Kautilyan logic is very clear: 'From the helplessness of villagers there comes concentration of the men upon their fields, hence increase of taxes, labour supply, wealth and grain.'

Kautilya seems to have deliberately fostered the rusticity of villagers to augment agricultural output so as to achieve the maximum levels of surplus expropriation. The exploiting character of the Maurya state is clearly demonstrated by Kautilya's own words: 'As for settling a land with the four castes, the one where the lowest castes predominate is the better because it will permit all sorts of exploitation.'

In the areas recently brought under the plough a sizeable portion may have constituted the king's domain (*sita*). In the early Pali literature, assignable to the pre-Maurya period, there are only a few references to big farms. But the Mauryas seem to have owned numerous such farms which were worked under the supervision of the superintendent of agriculture (*sitadhyaksha*) with the help of numerous slaves and hired labourers. The state farm, where the superintendent made use of an advanced knowledge of agriculture, was a source of royal income no less than the land cultivated by tax-paying private individuals.

Large-scale clearing of land by the state as well as the cultivation of the crown land under the direct supervision of its officers led to an unprecedented expansion of settled agriculture, especially in the Gangetic valley. But agricultural progress must have owed a great deal also to the provision of irrigation facilities by the government.

The *Arthashastra* refers to the distribution and measurement of water for irrigation; it also mentions a water tax collected regularly by the state wherever it provided assistance in irrigating fields. Pushyagupta, one of the governors of Chandragupta, is said to have built a dam across a river near Girnar in Saurashtra.

The expansion of village settlements under the aegis of the state was necessarily accompanied by the growth of trade, fostered in its turn by the development of the internal communication system. The clearing of land and founding of new agrarian settlements in what were previously forest regions facilitated movement from one place to another. There is evidence of considerable improvement in communications brought about by the Mauryas. Pataliputra was connected with Nepal via Vaishali. From there a road passed through Champaran to Kapilavastu, Kalsi (Dehradun district), and Hazra; it went up to Peshawar. Megasthenes refers to a road connecting north-western India with Pataliputra which was linked with Sasaram, Mirzapur and central India. A route connected the Mauryan capital with Kalinga which in its turn was connected with Andhra and Karnataka. Besides, the rivers of north India provided easy internal transport; the huge Ashokan monolithic pillars, quarried, chiselled and made cylindrical at Chunar on the river bank, were probably transported to distant destinations by river. The development of communications within the country helped inland trade just as, peaceful relations with the Greeks under Bindusara and Ashoka gave a fillip to foreign trade with the west.

The use of currency in the form of punch-marked coins had begun in the preceding period; now its use became a fairly common feature. Punch-marked coins (mostly silver) of the Maurya period have been discovered in large numbers in different parts of the subcontinent with a heavy concentration in north India especially in eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar which formed the nucleus of the empire, though their profusion and chronology have been questioned without much justification. Money was used not only for trade; the government paid its officers in cash. The scale of state salaries in the *Arthashastra,* ranging from 48,000 *panas* to 60 *panas* a year, is significant.

If credence is given to the *Arthshastra* evidence, the Maurya state exercised a rigid control through a number of superintendents over all trade and industry. The superintendent of commerce (known as

panyadhyaksha in the *Arthashastra*), whose existence is also indicated by Megasthenes, not only fixed prices of commodities but also intervened whenever there was a glut of any commodity. The office of the *samsthadhyaksha* (superintendent of markets) was designed to be a safeguard against fraudulent trade practices. The superintendent of weights and measures (*pautavadhyaksha*) was entrusted with the enforcement of standard weights and measures. All state boats were placed under the charge of a superintendent of ships (*navadhyaksha*), who regulated river traffic and collected ferry charges. The superintendent of tolls (*shulkadhyaksha*) collected from the traders customs dues ranging from 1/5 to 1/25 of the value. Superintendents were also appointed to look after the weaving industry, breweries and state liquor shops. On the one hand royal officers controlled and regulated private trade, on the other the Maurya state itself engaged in trade and commodity production. State goods (*rajapanya*) were normally to be sold by state servants, but the assistance of private traders was also sought.

The government derived income not only from its own economic undertakings but also from a large number of taxes mentioned in the *Arthashastra*. The land tax (*bhaga*), the chief item of revenue, seems to have been levied at the rate of one-sixth, though the Greek accounts suggest the rate of one-fourth. In addition to the principal land tax, water cess was levied. Sharecropping also brought substantial income to the state. The peasants had often to pay the *pindakara*, which was assessed on groups of villages. The nature of such taxes as *bali* and *kara* remains uncertain; the latter was probably a part of the produce from the fruit and flower gardens. Villagers were required to supply provisions to the royal army (*senabhakta*) passing through their areas, a practice which anticipated later feudal tyranny.

Hiranya, unlike the above dues, was not paid in kind but in cash. Customs and ferry charges were other important sources of income to the state exchequer. Guilds of artisans living in the capital (*durga*) were made to pay taxes; those in the countryside were presumably granted exemption. It would seem that the state made a deliberate attempt to expropriate as much surplus produce from the people as possible.

But even the numerous taxes mentioned by Kautilya seem to have fallen short of the needs of the state; for he recommends several fiscal

measures in emergency. One of these was the levy of *pranaya*, literally a gift of affection, which in practice may have brought misery to the people. The cultivators could be forced to raise two crops. Although a brahamana, Kautilya asks the king to confiscate temple treasures, put up sudden miracles and set up new images to collect money from the credulous. Patanjali, writing in the second century BC, mentions the Maurya practice of establishing cults for the sake of money. All these ordinary and emergency taxes, collected in cash and kind and deposited in the royal storehouse, formed the economic backbone of the Maurya empire.

An important aspect of the Maurya economy which increased royal power and assisted it in the maintenance of the vast empire was the state monopoly of mining and metallurgy. The *Arthashastra* clearly provides for the superintendent of mines (*akaradhyaksha*), his chief function being to prospect for new mines and reopen old and disused ones. The superintendent of salt, according to Kautilya, looked after the salt mines. Literary references indicate the mining of several metals, notably copper and gold. It is likely that the copper and gold mines in Dhalbhum in Chotanagpur were worked for the first time in the Maurya period. This may have been also the case with the gold mines in Mysore. Judging from a large number of silver punch-marked coins assignable to the time of the Mauryas, it may be suggested that silver mines were also worked. Frequent mention of various forms of iron in the *Arthashastra* provides clear indication of the working of the metal. As in the preceding period, iron technology may have been a major catalytic agent in the expansion of agriculture as can be inferred from the proliferation of settlements in the Maurya period. The intensive use of iron also provided the infrastructure for large-scale manufacture of punch-marked coins and the deluxe pottery called Northern Black Polished Ware, the introduction of ring wells and, most importantly, for the efflorescence of the pre-Mauryan towns as well as for rise of the new ones. This view, however, may not be acceptable to scholars who benefit from an advanced technology only to deliberately ignore its significance.

The state enjoyed a monopoly of mines, though a great deal of metal must have been sold to traders, artisans' guilds, goldsmiths and individual manufacturers. The monopoly rights of the state over mineral resources gave it exclusive control over the manufacture of

the metal weaponry and the supply of tools and implements needed for agriculture and industry. This strengthened the power of the Maurya government, particularly in view of the almost complete disarming of the rural population. The Kautilyan injunctions regarding the appointment of a large number of officers, the state control of industry and trade, the government monopoly of mines and metals and the realization of various forms of revenue from the people give the unmistakable impression that the Mauryan state was highly centralized. This has however been questioned by several historians in recent years. Admittedly the prescriptive nature of the *Arthashastra* and the uncertain chronology of its various sections make it difficult to determine the actual extent of control exercised by the Mauryas. But the relevant portions of this text read with the edicts of Ashoka and the Greek account clearly indicate that centralization of power in the hands of the emperor was the hallmark of the Maurya imperial administration. This is not to suggest that the Maurya kings were able to make their authority felt equally effectively throughout the country. The orders issued from the Maurya court at Pataliputra were possibly more difficult to implement in remote areas than those issued by the British Viceroys or the present day government of India. But overemphasis on the alleged decentralized nature of the Maurya administration is perhaps rooted in the neo-colonialist ideas invading Indian historiography in recent years.

The Mauryas created a well-organized state machinery characterized by a stable fiscal system and a reasonably large bureaucracy which functioned in the heartland of their empire. Through their territorial expansion they were also able to facilitate trading and missionary activities. It is probable that the interaction between adminstrators and Buddhist and Jaina monks on the one hand and the people of distant parts of the country on the other led to the spread of the material culture of the Gangetic valley into the peripheral areas of the empire—a phenomenon amply attested by archaeological evidence. In spite of this the people in the Maurya empire were living at different levels of culture. Its inhabitants ranged from hunter-gatherers in backward areas, to the iron using population of Pataliputra, one of the greatest, if not the greatest city in the world at the time. The *Arthashastra* of Kautilya and the inscriptions of Ashoka refer to numerous tribes. They had to be won in favour of settled agrarian

life and converted into members of a class society based on private property. Kautilya devotes an entire chapter to the methods of systematically breaking up free tribes. In the initial phase dissension was to be sown within the tribe through the use of spies, poison, brahmanas, soothsayers, liquor, women, actors and cash bribes. But at a later stage the king was to make armed intervention, breakup the tribe, and deport its members to distant lands in units of five to ten families, presumably to settle in the newly colonized areas. It would be, however, wrong to suppose that tribes broke up only through external violence. Their disintegration may well have been caused by the expansion of settled life in certain areas under the auspices of the state.

In those areas where settled agricultural life came to be established, social organization was based on *varna*. The traditional *varnas* became endogamous; their rigidity may have generated tensions. Megasthenes refers to seven castes—philosophers, farmers, soldiers, herdsmen, artisans, magistrates and councillors. Evidently he confused caste with occupation. Kautilya enumerates the duties of four castes; in this he draws heavily on the earlier brahmanical lawgivers. The brahmanas enjoyed the highest position in society and several concessions and privileges were recommended for them. This was in contrast to their portrayal in the Buddhist literature as socially inferior to kshatriyas. The first three castes—brahmana, kshatriya and vaishya—were *dvija* (twice-born); theoretically they were more advantaged than the shudras and untouchables. Kautilya refers to no less than fifteen mixed castes by the general name *antyavasayin* (literally living at the end). They are supposed to have originated in miscegenation and lived beyond the pale of the brahmanical social order. Members of such mixed castes as the Chandala and Svapaka were untouchables; they were required to live outside the main settlement, near the cremation ground. But for the first time during the Maurya period a section of shudras, hitherto agricultural labourers, were provided with land in the newly colonized areas; they were also employed as sharecroppers on crown lands. Forced labour (*vishti*) was imposed on them on a much larger scale than in the earlier period; a class of government servants known as *vishtivandhakas* (mentioned for the first time by Kautilya) worked as its procurer.

Kautilya fixes the wages of artisans, who were probably mostly

shudras. They seem to have been the worst paid members of society. According to him the slaves (*dasas*) and hired labourers (*karmakaras*) under the employ of the state were to be given 'particles of rice' and bad liquor. He recommends the recruitment of vaishyas and shudras in the army; but their actual enrolment as soldiers is extremely doubtful.

Whether or not slavery existed in Maurya India has been a matter of controversy. Megasthenes tells us that there were no slaves in India. But the *Arthashastra* contains detailed laws about slavery and manumission. Slaves were mostly shudras and supplied the bulk of labour power. In special circumstances members of higher *varnas* could also be mortgaged; Kautilya refers to them as *ahitakas*. He also lays down rules to regulate the treatment of slaves. His laws relating to *ahitakas* are liberal. His anxiety to protect the position of the ex-Arya slaves as distinguished from the non-Arya or shudra slaves is understandable; Kautilya was a brahmana.

The social order however did not function as smoothly as envisaged by the brahmanical lawgivers. Like the brahmanas and kshatriyas, the vaishyas were also *dvijas*, albeit socially inferior to them. Through their participation in trade and commerce the vaishyas acquired wealth; through their trade guilds they often controlled urban institutions. Yet they were denied the social prestige to which they felt entitled. Their support for such heterodox sects as Buddhism and Jainism may have been an expression of their resentment against the two higher castes. The shudras were no less hostile to the upper classes. They were grossly dissatisfied with their living conditions and indulged in criminal activities. Several categories of offenders and suspects, listed by Kautilya, belonged to the shudra order. He ordains that when a shudra calls himself a brahmana, steals the property of gods, or is hostile to the king, either his eyes shall be destroyed by the application of a poisonous ointment, or he shall have to pay a fine of 800 *panas*. This implies that some shudras bore hostility to the priestly and ruling classes.

Our sources indicate the existence of several religious sects which may have led to tensions and conflicts. In spite of the growing influence of Buddhism and Jainism, the Vedas did not completely lose their hold on the people. Kautilya extolled the Vedic way of life. He prescribed Vedic sacraments (*samskaras*) such as *chaulakarma*,

upanayana, *godana*, for the prince who was expected to perform Vedic sacrifices. There are indications in the *Arthashastra* that several deities were worshipped in temples; this would imply the existence of religious ideas quite different from those found in the Vedas. Among the gods mentioned in the text, Shiva and Samkarshana were later to become central deities in the brahmanical pantheon; they were referred to by Megasthenes as Dionysus. The Greek ambassador also speaks of Herakles being worshipped in Mathura region; this god may have been the many-faceted Krishna of later legends. Shri of the *Arthashastra*, identified with Shri-Lakshmi (the wife of Vishnu), may have originally been a non-Aryan fertility goddess who found her way into the brahmanical religion. According to Kautilya, the worship of these deities consisted of prostration before the image, and gifts (*upahara*), especially of flowers and incense (*pushpachurnopahara*); this anticipated the theistic sects which later became popular in various parts of the country. Evidence of the popular belief in malevolent spirits, magical practices and superstitions of all kinds also find mention in the *Arthashastra*; and perhaps formed part of the popular culture.

By the fourth century BC Buddhism had emerged as a distinct religion with potential for expansion. Although it had been mainly confined to the regions of Magadha and Koshala before the time of Ashoka, small communities of brethren had spread as far as Mathura and Ujjaini. The Buddhist church was gradually losing its unity on account of expansion. The third Buddhist council convened at Pataliputra marked the final attempt of the sectarian Buddhists to reorganize the church and to exclude dissidents and innovators; it also decided to send missionaries to various parts of the subcontinent. Jainism could not make as much progress, however. Ashokan inscriptions refer to Jainas as nirgranthas (those who have broken worldly ties); the *Arthashastra* does not mention them at all. Nirgranthas lived in Magadha in the fourth century BC; later tradition speaks of their presence in Pundravardhana (north Bengal) in the time of Ashoka. Perhaps more important than the Jaina was the Ajivika movement, founded by Makkhali Gosala, a contemporary of the Buddha. The Ajivikas seem to have remained important throughout the Maurya period; Ashoka as well as his grandson Dasharatha dedicated some caves to them in the Nagarjuni hills in Bihar.

It appears that diverse religious ideas and practices existed in the

vast empire of the Mauryas. But the followers of such sects as Buddhism, Jainism and Ajivikism were held in contempt by the brahmanas, whose position they must have undermined. Kautilya described them as *vrishala* and *pashanda*. The *pashandas*, according to him, were to live at the edges of human habitation or near the cremation grounds. He prescribed a heavy fine for inviting Buddhist and Ajivika monks to dinners in honour of deities or dead ancestors. The ideological conflict between the Vedic brahmanas and the followers of the newly born protestant creeds may have been a potential source of social and religious tension, though actual instances of this are unrecorded.

It was against this background that Ashoka expounded his policy of *dhamma* to eliminate social tension and sectarian conflicts, and to promote a harmonious relationship between the diverse elements of the vast empire. *Dhamma* is the Prakrit equivalent of the Sanskrit word *dharma*, translated as religion in modern times. But the term used in the Ashokan edicts has a much wider connotation. It indicates more than mere piety resulting from good deeds inspired by any formal religious faith. Ashoka's insistence on abstinence from killing, considerate relationships between parents and children, elders and young people, friends, masters and servants, various religious sects and his excessive concern for the general welfare of the subjects suggest that his *dharma* was an ethical code aimed at building up an attitude of social responsibility among the people. His policy of *dhamma* sought to make a strong case for the recognition of the dignity of man; it was a plea for the inculcation of virtuous behaviour transcending all social, religious and cultural barriers. The concept of *dhamma* was very likely conditioned by the vastness of the empire, whose unity would be preserved by overcoming tensions generated by the existence of divergent social, religious and cultural elements. Ashoka therefore laid emphasis on toleration, which was one of the basic principles of *dhamma*. By pleading for 'consideration towards slaves and servants, obedience to mother and father, generosity towards friends, acquaintances and relatives and towards priests and monks', Ashoka sought to promote harmony in the family and the community. Religious eclecticism occupies an important place in his rescripts. He claims to have honoured all sects as well as both ascetics and laymen with gifts and various forms of recognition. In the thirteenth

year of his reign he donated two caves in the Barabar hills to the Ajivikas. In the eyes of the emperor, however, far more important than gifts and honours to different religious sects was their essential advancement. This, according to him, could be achieved if one desisted from extolling one's own sect and disparaging that of another. By not permitting free expression of differences of opinion one may very often aggravate concealed tensions. But Ashoka's insistence on their suppression may be understood in the context of the need for unity in the empire.

Contrary to this emphasis on toleration, Ashoka banned festive meetings or gatherings perhaps due to his fear of conflicts arising out of differences of opinion; only those sponsored by the state seem to have been permissible. The measure was in conformity with the strictly centralized administration of the of the Maurya empire. Popular meetings could be utilized to criticise and attack the king's new ideas. Their suppression therefore seems to have been intended to stifle popular opposition.

In spite of his religious eclecticism Ashoka denounced all 'useless ceremonies and sacrifices' held under the influence of superstition. He was particularly critical of such ceremonies as were performed during illness, at the birth or marriage of a child, or when setting out on a journey. Women are specially censured for observing religious and nonsensical rites. Ashoka's attack on ritual and sacrifice was probably intended to undermine the influence of the priest who presided over them and derived advantage from popular superstition.

Ashoka's *dhamma* also emphasized non-violence. Overwhelmed by the horror of the Kalinga war he is said to have renounced all further bloodshed, though it seems likely that his remorse over the war grew over the years and not immediately after. In one of his edicts he prohibits animal slaughter. If this order applied only to the state sanctuaries of certain animals, as has been suggested, Ashoka's measure would seem to be merely a continuation of the policy of Kautilya according to whom killing of animals listed as inviolable was a punishable offence. It is more likely that Ashoka sought to prevent only the ritual sacrifice of animals and did not contemplate a general prohibition of animal slaughter; for he states that two peacocks and a deer were killed daily in the royal kitchen. This measure obviously hit the interests of the brahmanas, for whom animal sacrifice was a

source of livelihood. In spite of his renunciation of war and a check on the killing of animals for ritual purposes, Ashoka did not wholly abjure violence. In dealing with the troublesome forest tribes he clearly recognized the possibility of the use of violence.

The policy of *dhamma* included several measures relating to social welfare. After the tenth year of his reign when he visited Bodh Gaya, Ashoka inaugurated the system of royal tours (*dhammayatra*). Perhaps through these tours he came into contact with the masses, explained his policies to them and also took interest in their general well-being. The edict at Brahmagiri was issued by the emperor on tour, which indicates that he journeyed to the southernmost parts of his realm. Royal excursions in the outlying areas of the empire also acted as a check on local officials. In addition, every high administrative official throughout the empire was ordered to undertake a tour every five years.

To implement his policy of *dhamma* Ashoka created a new class of officers known as *dhammamahamattas* (Sanskrit, *dharmamahamatras*), who were given control over officials and special funds. They were active not only in and around Pataliputra but also in remote frontier areas and among the neighbouring peoples. They looked into the complaints of law abiding groups and sects, ensured fair treatment to them and attended to the welfare of prisoners. Some of them were specially appointed to take care of Buddhists, brahmanas, Ajivikas or Nirgranthas. These officers were directly responsible for the implementation of the policy of *dhamma*. They were permitted entry into the houses of all sections of society including those of the royal family. Perhaps the power of the *dhammamahamattas* to interfere in the lives of the people increased over the years. Ashoka also tried to propagate his religious ideology through his edicts inscribed on rocks or monolithic pillars.

Ashoka's religion greatly influenced art; according to the Buddhist tradition he constructed 84,000 *stupas*, but this figure need not be taken literally. The best specimens of contemporary art are the tall monolithic highly polished columns, standing free in space, often crowned with animal figures. At least fourteen such pillars are known; a few of them may date from before the time of Ashoka. All Maurya columns are chiselled out of grey Chunar sandstone and possess a lustrous polish perhaps because of the application of silicious varnish

on the stone. It has been suggested that at or near Chunar an art centre was established and patronized by the Maurya court. An important function of these columns seems to have been to impress and overawe the people with the power and majesty of the Maurya monarchs. This may explain the imposing stateliness of the pillars and of the animal figures crowning them.

Remains of Maurya architecture are few. Excavations at Kumrahar (Patna) have brought to light a Maurya palace with a pillared hall, which owed its design to the Hall of Hundred Columns built by Darius. According to the dominant view the main inspiration of Maurya art was Persian imperial art. Lacking social roots, it failed to influence later artistic developments in India. But in the sphere of cave architecture the Mauryas seem to have made a lasting contribution. The excavated halls of the Barabar and Nagarjuni caves belong to the time of Ashoka and his successor Dasharatha; later cave architecture owed a great deal to them. Several stone sculptures found in and around Patna have been ascribed to the Maurya period, though this has been questioned by some scholars. The most sophisticated of these sculptures is the statue of a voluptuous female *chauri* (fly-whisk) bearer found at Didarganj near Patna. Unlike the imperial stone-carving tradition which may have touched only a minority of inhabitants, terracotta was a popular medium for sculpture, pottery, ornaments and toys. But no comprehensive study of the Maurya terracotta art has so far been undertaken.

Towards the end of his reign Ashoka's grip over the imperial organization became weak. His policy of *dhamma* failed to achieve the desired goal; social tensions continued. Taxila, which had revolted earlier in his father's reign, was goaded to rebellion again by ministerial oppression. Prince Kunala was most probably sent to suppress it, and the Buddhist legends depicting him as blinded at the instigation of his proud and lustful stepmother whose infatuation for him remained unreciprocated need not be taken seriously. That official high-handedness often led to popular resentment is also suggested by Ashoka's own edict.

The Maurya empire began to decline with the death of Ashoka in 232 BC; soon after it broke up. The empire was divided into western and eastern halves. The western part, according to one view, was ruled by Kunal and then for a while by Samprati. It was threatened



Plate 4: Yakshi chauri-bearer. Didarganj, Patna, *c.* third-second century BC. Polished sandstone. Ht: 160 cm, 204 cm with pedestal. Patna Museum, Patna.

from the north-west by the Bactrian Greeks, to whom it was practically lost by 180 BC. From the south the threat was posed by the Andhras or Satavahanas who later came to power in the Deccan. The eastern part of the Maurya empire, with its capital at Pataliputra, continued to be governed for nearly half a century by Ashoka's successors. Brihadratha was the last ruler in the main line of the Mauryas. He is said to have been slain in 181-180 BC by his brahmana general Pushyamitra Shunga, who founded an independent dynasty.

Ashoka has been blamed for bringing about the disintegration of the empire. His pro-Buddhist policy is said to have antagonized brahmanas. But his general administrative policy was neither specifically pro-Buddhist nor pronouncedly anti-brahmana. Ashoka's supposed obsession with non-violence is said to have led to the weakening of the Maurya army. This however is hardly warranted by his rescripts. The decline of the Maurya empire may largely be ascribed to the economic consequences of Ashoka's policy. After the conquest of Kalinga the emperor fought no wars; the army was used only for parades and public spectacles. The huge army became superfluous and much too costly to maintain. The pre-Ashokan bureaucracy itself was very large; Ashoka added substantially to its size by appointing many new officers, who, unlike those mentioned in the *Arthashastra*, had nothing to do with the organization of production. His charitable public works, doubtless indicative of his paternal affection for the people, only strained the state exchequer. His extravagant charity to the Buddhist church proved ruinous for the state as well as for him. According to a legend, it drove him to penury towards his last days when he was left with half a mango. The emperor's lavish philanthropy was also alluded to by Fa-hsien several centuries later.

While the state treasury was drained of its wealth, the mounting expenditure of administration had to be met by the limited revenues derived from the established agrarian economy of the Gangetic valley; the peninsular region was not yet fully colonized and could not therefore yield much revenue to the state. Even in the Magadhan heartland largescale land clearance must have led to thinning out of forests. Deforestation meant increasing floods damaging the crops, and hence a complete loss of revenue as well as a drain of the state finances for relief measures. Much of all this may sound conjectural. But the decreasing silver content of the punch-marked coins attributed to the later Maurya rulers indicates debasement of currency—a measure necessary to meet the needs of a depleted treasury. Thus the ultimate political disintegration of the Maurya empire may be said to have been caused in a large measure by the gradual weakening of the imperial finances, notwithstanding the obdurate denial of any pressure on Maurya economy by some historians.

CHAPTER 7

Invasions, Trade and Culture c. 200 BC–AD 300

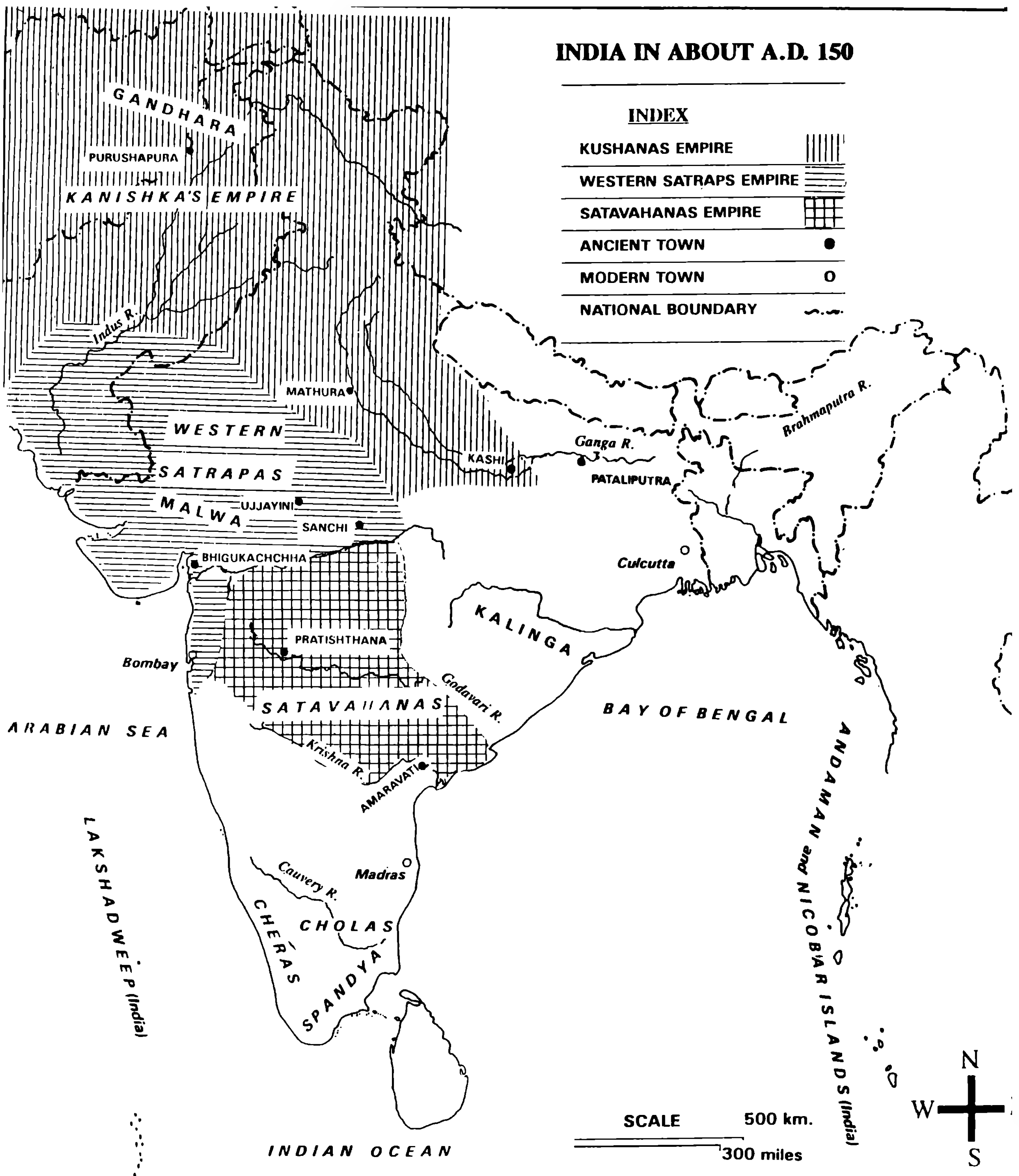
THE RECONSTRUCTION of the history of the subcontinent after Maurya rule is based on a variety of sources. The dynastic genealogies found in the early Puranas, whose compilation may have begun during the early centuries of the Christian era, throw light on the political history of the times; their value is enhanced when corroborated by inscriptions. Although the Dharmashastra works composed during the post-Maurya period are normative, they provide the basic material for understanding the changing social structure. The foremost of these treatises is the lawbook of Manu (*Manusmriti*). The epigraphic records in Kharoshthi found in large numbers in Gandhara and Central Asia refer to different facets of India's regular contacts with these regions. Pieces of information may also be culled from such texts as the *Gargi Samhita* and the *Mahabhashya* of Patanjali. The Buddhist Jatakas, *Divyavadana, Mahavastu* and the *Milindpanho* (Sanskrit, *Milindaprashna*) are equally useful. Sometimes even such late works as the *Malavikagnimitra* of Kalidasa and the *Harshacharita* of Banabhatta provide some information bearing on the period after the overthrow of the Mauryas. Coins bearing the names of rulers appeared in the first century BC and are of immense value for political history, and more importantly, for appreciating social and economic developments. Roman coins discovered in the subcontinent enable us to understand the pattern of trade between India and the Western world—a theme which cannot be studied without the classical Graeco-Roman accounts. The most well known of these accounts is the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* written by an anonymous Greek seafarer. The early Tamil literature, known as the Shangam, throws light on the process of social and political transformation in the far south. In addition to these sources, the vast body of material recovered from explorations

and excavations of nearly 150 sites during the last half century and the impressive testimony of art and architecture both within the country and outside, are of great help in reconstructing the social and cultural history of the period.

Though marked by the absence of a large empire comparable to that of the Mauryas, the five centuries following their rule were historically important and witnessed significant developments. Contacts with Central and West Asia as well as with China and, to a certain extent, with South-East Asia, promoted an active interaction between India and outside world leading to the assimilation of elements which added new dimensions to Indian culture and enriched it in many ways. During this phase there emerged several political entities in different parts of the country; some of them, especially the Deccan and the southern tip of the Indian peninsula, were exposed to the process of state formation perhaps for the first time.

In north India the immediate successors of the Mauryas were the Shungas, a brahmana family of obscure origin. Very likely they came from the region of Ujjain, where they had served the Mauryas. Pushyamitra, a general of the last Maurya king Brihadratha, succeeded in gaining power by slaying his master. The centre of his kingdom was Vidisha in Madhya Pradesh. He is described as an enthusiastic supporter of the orthodox brahmanical faith, and is said to have performed two *ashvamedha* sacrifices. Buddhist literature portrays him as a persecutor of Buddhists and destroyer of their monasteries and places of worship. The 84,000 *stupas* built by Ashoka, we are told, were destroyed by Pushyamitra. This however is contradicted by the Buddhist remains at Bharhut, assignable to the time of the Shungas. The stories of his persecution of Buddhists obviously betray sectarian bias.

The Shungas fought a number of wars. They campaigned against the kingdom of Vidarbha (Berar) in the northern Deccan. In the north-west they fought the Greeks. In the south-east they may have led expeditions against the king of Kalinga, but this has been questioned by some scholars. The Shunga dominions comprised the entire Gangetic valley and extended to the river Narmada. The cities of Pataliputra, Ayodhya and Vidisha were included in the Shunga kingdom; according to a Buddist work Jallundur and Sakala (Sialkot) were also incorporated in it. Within a hundred years however the


INDIA IN ABOUT A.D. 150
INDEX
KUSHANAS EMPIRE
WESTERN SATRAPS EMPIRE
SATAVAHANAS EMPIRE
ANCIENT TOWN
MODERN TOWN
NATIONAL BOUNDARY
GANDHARA
PURUSHAPURA
KANISHKA'S EMPIRE
Indus R.
MATHURA
WESTERN
SATRAPAS
MALWA
UJJAYINI
SANCHI
KASHI
Ganga R.
PATALIPUTRA
Brahmaputra R.
BHIGUKACHCHHA
Culcutta
KALINGA
PRATISHTHANA
Bombay
Godavari R.
SATAVAHANAS
BAY OF BENGAL
ARABIAN SEA
Krishna R.
AMARAVATI
LAKSHADWEEP (India)
ANDAMAN and NICOBAR ISLANDS (India)
Madras
Cauvery R.
CHERAS
CHOLAS
SPANDYA
SCALE
500 km.
300 miles
N
W
S
INDIAN OCEAN

kingdom of the Shungas was reduced to the confines of Magadha. Here they were succeeded by the brahmana family of the Kanvas who precariously held on to the territory until 28 BC.

The fall of the two brahmana dynasties was followed by the rise of independent principalities of Ayodhya, Kaushambi, Mathura and Ahichchhatra (all in Uttar Pradesh). The tribal states which had earlier succumbed to the might of the Mauryas now seem to have reasserted themselves, even if temporarily. To the south-east of Mathura, the Arjunayanas established their independence towards the end of the Shunga period. In the Panjab also the existence of a number of tribal polities is attested by numismatic evidence. The Audumbaras occupied the land between the upper courses of the Ravi and Beas. The Kunindas became prominent in the area between the Beas and the Yamuna near the foot of the Sivalik hills. The region between the Ravi and the Sutlej, corresponding to the modern Jullundur division of the Panjab, was under the Trigartas. The country between the Sutlej and the Yamuna, comprising the modern Ludhiana, Ambala, Karnal, Rohtak and Hissar districts, was held by the Yaudheyas, famous as professional warriors and known to Panini, who lived in about the fifth century BC. To the west of the Yaudheya territory lay the region controlled by the Agastyas.

The most important political development of the post-Maurya period, however, was a series of movements from across the north-western borders. The first to cross the Hindukush were the Bactrian Greeks. They were known in early Indian literature as Yavanas; the word was derived from the old Persian *Yauna*, signifying originally Ionian Greeks but later all people of Greek nationality. Already during the rule of the Achaemenids Asiatic Greeks had settled in Bactria (Balkh). More Greek settlements came into being during the time of Alexander and his general Seleukos Nikator. About the middle of the third century BC Diodotus, the governor of Bactria, revolted against the Seleucid king Antiochus. After an unsuccessful attempt to subjugate Bactria Antiochus III eventually recognized its independence and gave a Seleucid bride to the great-grandson of Diodotus in 200 BC. The Seleucid ruler however was able to cross the Hindukush mountains; he is said to have defeated the Maurya ruler Subhagasena in 206 BC.

The north-western region of India did not lose its attraction for

the Greeks. In the early second century BC Demetrius, son of Euthedemus, pressed further into India. He and his successors led several campaigns into India; one such, perhaps under king Menander, is said to have reached Pataliputra. Menander ruled from 155 to 130 BC and gave some kind of stability to the Indo-Greek power in India. His coins have been found as far apart as Kabul in Afghanistan and Mathura near Delhi. His kingdom is said to have comprised the Swat valley, and the Hazara district and the Panjab as far as the river Ravi. Menander was the best known among the Indo-Greek kings. He attained fame as Milinda in the Buddhist text, *Milindapanho* (*Milindaprashna*, literally, the *Questions of King Milinda*), which records discussions with the philosopher Nagasena that resulted in his conversion to Buddhism. His death was followed by a brief period of regency after which Strato became the king. Soon thereafter the Greek ascendancy in the north-west waned. The Greeks, no doubt, failed to establish their authority for long, but the significance of their rule cannot be minimized. They were the first to issue coins in large numbers which, unlike the punch-marked coins, could be attributed to kings with certainty. They were also the first rulers to mint gold coins, which increased subsequently during the time of the Kushana rulers. The short spell of their dominion in north-western parts of the country is thus important in the monetary history of India. But its significance also lay in the fact that the Greeks introduced features of Hellenistic art in the north-western part of the subcontinent; this culminated in the development of what is known as the Gandhara school of art.

The Indo-Greek power in north-western India did not long survive. Climatic and political causes led to new movements of central Asian nomadic tribes, known as the Scythians. The pressure of the Chinese empire consolidated under Shi Huang Ti, who built the Great Wall, as well as the drying up of their pastures drove nomads including the Yueh-Chi westward. Pressed from the north and east, the Scythians attacked Bactria and occupied it. Close on their heels were the Yueh-Chi. Therefore the Scythians, known as Shakas in Patanjali's *Mahabhasya* and in other early Indian sources, moved from Bactria and invaded Iran and then the Greek kingdoms in India. By the middle of the first century BC only a few Greek chiefs ruled in India, and several branches of the Shakas controlled a much larger part of India than

the Greeks did. They do not seem to have met effective resistance. Tradition has it that a king of Ujjain drove them out for a while, called himself Vikramaditya and established the Vikrama era to commemorate his victory over them in 57 BC. How far this is reliable is difficult to say, for we have no less than fourteen Vikramadityas in Indian history up to the twelfth century. In all probability the Shakas extended their power as far into the country as Mathura. The first Shaka king was Maues or Moga (*c.* 80 BC) who is known from inscriptions and a series of coins. There is evidence to suggest the establishment of the relics of the Buddha in a *stupa* at Taxila during his period. The most important Shaka ruler in India was Rudradaman who exercised control over Sindh, Kutch, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Konkan, the Narmada valley, Malwa, Kathiawar and the western Deccan. He is famous for repairing the Sudarshana lake which was in use for irrigation in the semi-arid zone of Kathiawad from the time of the Mauryas. Rudradaman was the first king to issue a long inscription in chaste Sanskrit. The first ruler to elevate Sanskrit to the status of a court language was thus a king whose origins can be traced to a region outside India.

Towards the close of the first century BC a line of kings with Iranian names, usually known as Pahlavas or Indo-Parthians, gained control of north-western India. The best known of this group of kings is Gondopharnes who probably ruled in the first century AD. To his court came St. Thomas, through whom India first came into contact with Christianity. The Christian missionary, according to later Christian sources, moved to Kerala and finally achieved martyrdom at Mylapur near Madras where he is said to have been assassinated. His proselytizing mission is not well documented, but the Christian association of Gondopharnes is highly probable. It has been suggested that he was the same as Kaspar, one of the three kings of the East, who play an important role in Christian tradition. We do not have much information about his immediate successor and nephew Abdagases. But the Parthians, like the Shakas who had preceded them, were assimilated into Indian society.

The Indo-Parthian power however broke up with the advance of the Yueh-Chi people. From a Chinese source we learn that in the first century the Yueh-Chi chief Kujula Kadphises united the five tribes of the Yueh-Chi, crossed the Hindukush mountains and

established himself in Kabul and Kashmir; he is credited with the defeat of the last of the Greek kings in Kabul. Kujula died at the age of eighty. His son Vima Kadphises succeeded him. Vima issued gold coins, which influenced subsequent Kushana monetary policy; for after him the Kushanas minted basically in gold and copper.

After a brief interregnum the house of Kadphises was succeeded by that of Kanishka, whose relationship with the two preceding kings is uncertain. The provenance of the gold coins of the Kushanas and of their inscriptions indicates that they had established their sway not only over the north-western India and Sindh but also over the greater part of the Gangetic valley. Kanishka was the most famous ruler of the Kushana dynasty. Under him the Kushanas reached the height of their power and became a mighty force in the contemporary world. In India his suzerainty extended as far south as Sanchi and as far east as Banaras. In Central Asia his dominions were extensive. Purushapur (Peshawar) was his capital, Mathura being the second most important city of the empire. The date of his accession is a matter of inconclusive debate but AD 78 seems to be the most probable of the dates suggested so far. This year marks the beginning of an era that came to be known as the Shaka era; the recent suggestion that it began in AD 120 or 144 is far from convincing.

Kanishka is often remembered for his association with Buddhism. Himself a Buddhist convert, he convened the fourth Buddhist council in Kashmir to discuss matters relating to theology and doctrine. He encouraged missionary activities; Buddhist missions were sent to Central Asia and China. Kanishka is said to have constructed at Peshawar a multistoreyed tower enshrining a relic of the Buddha. The Chinese traveller Hsuan Tsang, who came to India in the seventh century, gives a detailed account of the *stupa*. Even at the time of Al-Biruni (eleventh century) it was a vivid memory. Excavations at Peshawar have provided a plan of the *stupa*, the location of the *vihara*, a few examples of figurative sculpture in stone and stucco, and the celebrated Kanishka reliquary.

Several Buddhist theologians are associated with Kanishka—Ashvaghosha, Vasumitra, Parshva, Sangharaksha, Dharmatrata and Matricheta. But Kanishka's patronage of Buddhism seems to have been essentially political. Legends apart, there is very little evidence to suggest that his conversion to Buddhism was a profound experience.

Buddhist emblems appear on his coins, but they are few and are outnumbered far by other types of coins bearing the images of non-Buddhist and non-Indian deities. This is indicative of a policy of religious syncretism which was necessary to promote the existing variety of cultures and religious traditions in Kanishka's far-flung empire and to encourage a peaceful interaction among them. Kanishka is traditionally believed to have died fighting in Central Asia. The Chinese annals speak of a Kushana king who had asked for a Han princess in marriage and was defeated by the general Pan Chao towards the end of the first century AD. That king may have been Kanishka. His successors ruled for a hundred years, but the Kushana power declined under them. About the middle of the third century AD a king of the Sassanian dynasty of Persia defeated Vasudeva, one of Kanishka's descendants, and reduced the Kushanas to a subordinate position.

Meanwhile new kingdoms had come into being in the region to the south-east of the Chotanagpur plateau and in the Deccan. One of them was Kalinga. First conquered by the Nandas and then re-conquered by Ashoka, it contained a Maurya provincial headquarter at Tosali, and its people lived in a prestate phase. The interaction between the autochthonous elements and the Maurya power, however, accelerated the process of state formation in the region and Kalinga emerged as an independent state towards the end of the second century BC under a local ruling house of the Mahameghavahanas. Under Kharavela, the third ruler of this line, in the middle of the first century BC it achieved political prominence and remained a source of trouble to the Magadhan rulers for some time. A long inscription of Kharavela from Hathigumpha, engraved on the Udayagiri hills near Bhuvaneswar, enables us to reconstruct his biography despite its being in a bad state of preservation. He was a Jaina by faith, though given to military conquests. He claims to have defeated the king of the western Deccan, occupied Rajagriha in the north and conquered Magadha. The record also tells us that he attacked the Greeks in the north-west, and overran the Pandyan kingdom in the south. Kharavela enlarged an irrigation canal originally dug by a Nanda king and spent large sums of money on the welfare of his subjects. After him Kalinga lapsed into political oblivion for several centuries. Though Pliny (died AD 79) refers to the Kalingas

(Calingae) as divided into several branches, and substantial archaeological material has been unearthed in Orissa after Independence, no coherent reconstruction of political developments in the region is possible.

In the north-western Deccan arose the kingdom of the Satavahanas in the first century BC, with its centre at Pratishthana (modern Paithan in Maharashtra). Since the Satavahanas were known as Andhras, it is suggested that they originated in the Andhra region whence they moved up the river Godavari, took advantage of the disintegration of the Maurya empire, and established themselves in the west. But according to another view they originally belonged to the western Deccan and gradually extended their territorial jurisdiction towards the eastern coast, which was therefore called Andhra in course of time. Since the earliest inscriptions of the Satavahanas are found in the western Deccan, the latter view may be correct.

The Andhras are mentioned first in the *Aitareya Brahmana* and then in the records of Ashoka. Later, along with a few other tribal groups, they figure in the epics and Puranas. Probably they occupied the Deccan region around the middle of the first millennium BC or slightly earlier as iron-using people with several ceramic traditions. Their graves were encircled by big pieces of stone and therefore they are known as the megalithic people. They may have been exposed to the process of a major social and political transformation as a result of the expansion of the Mauryas in peninsular India where they were primarily interested in mining gold, diamond and gems. The demand for these commodities gave rise to market centres like Dharanikota on the Krishna in the Guntur district (Andhra Pradesh) and Karad in the Satara district (Maharashtra). This led to the southward diffusion of the material culture of the Gangetic valley with consequent disruption of local tribal groups. Many chiefs known as Maharathis became important in different pockets and were related by marriage to the Satavahanas under whom the first state developed in the Deccan. It is likely that they held important positions under the Mauryas whose influence can be seen on Satavahana polity.

The first Satavahana king Simuka is believed to have destroyed the Shunga power. But the Satavahanas were driven out of the western Deccan by the Shakas of the Kshaharata clan. Coins and inscriptions of the Shaka chief Nahapana have been found around Nasik, indicating

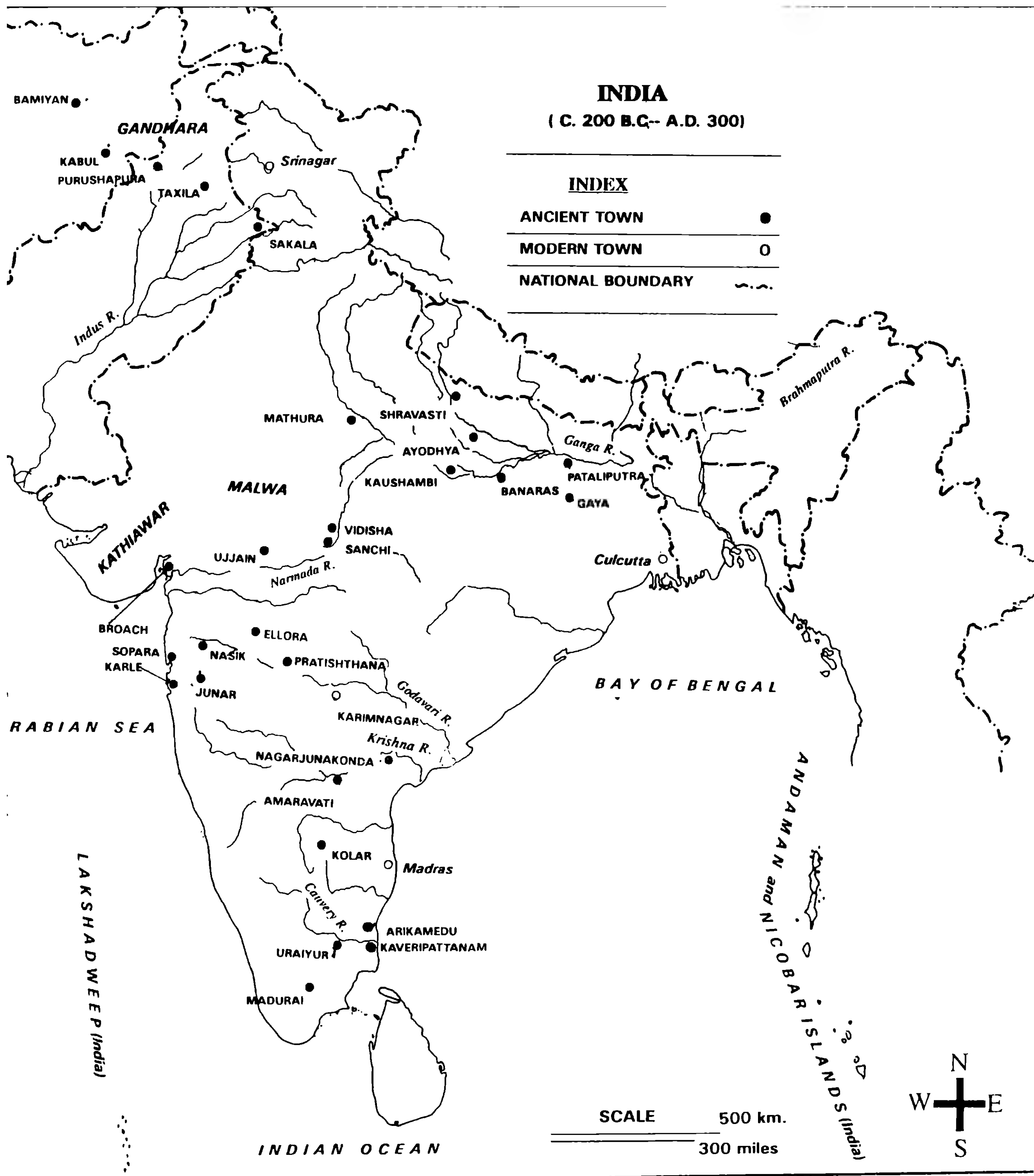
Shaka dominance in the area towards the close of the first century AD or the beginning of the second. But the Satavahanas under the greatest of their rulers, Gautamiputra Shatakarni, recovered their western possessions. Gautamiputra and his son Vasishthiputra (who ruled in the first half of the second century) extended their territory and gave the Satavahanas a position of eminence. Gautamiputra is said to have destroyed the power of the Shakas and the pride of the kshatriyas, promoted the interests of the twice-born and stopped the mixing of the four *varnas*. In spite of this claim, a matrimonial alliance was concluded in an effort to compose the conflict between the Shakas and the Satavahanas. Rudradaman of the western Shaka dynasty, ruling in the mid-second century in Rajasthan and Sind, gave his daughter in marriage to the Satavahana king. The purpose of the alliance however was far from achieved. One of his records states that Rudradaman twice defeated a Satavahana adversary in battle but did not kill him because of a close relationship. Following the death of Rudradaman, the Satavahanas successfully attacked Shaka territory and regained their lost possessions. Towards the end of the second century the Satavahanas ruled over Kathiawad on the west coast and the Krishna delta and northern Tamilnadu in the south-east.

The third century saw the gradual weakening of Satavahana power, local governors claiming independent status. After their fall a number of kingdoms came into being. In the north-western Deccan the Abhiras came into prominence; in Maharashtra and Kuntala the Chutus and after them the Kadambas became powerful. The Ikshvakus established themselves in Andhradesha; in the south-eastern part of the former Satavahana empire the Pallavas founded an independent dynasty and expanded into a great power by the middle of the sixth century. The Vakatakas became powerful in the region of Vidarbha (Berar).

The change from tribe to incipient state in the deep south seems to have taken several centuries. Around the middle of the first millennium BC or even earlier, the uplands of Tamilnadu, like eastern Andhra Pradesh, were occupied by the iron-using megalithic people who are generally known by their graves. Their grave goods include both weapons and agricultural tools and implements. Initially the megalithic people, according to the archaeological evidence, practised agriculture on a limited scale and produced paddy and *ragi*. The

Shangam texts, however, give us a better idea of their subsistence strategies which were conditioned by the different ecological zones (*tinai*) in which they lived. In the fertile riparian plains (*marutam*), where they reclaimed land, they took to agriculture on a large scale and practised wet paddy cultivation. In the hilly backwoods (*kurinchi*) hunting and gathering were the mainstay of their existence. Plunder and cattle raids were common in the parched lands (*palai*). In the pastoral tract (*mullai*) animal husbandry and shifting agriculture were practised. Fishing and salt-manufacturing were the chief occupations in the coastal region (*neital*). The small and generally self-sustaining eco-zones grew into larger ones through mutual interaction and interdependence which undermined the ethos of tribal egalitarianism and paved the way for the rise of social classes and dominant chiefdoms. This process was accelerated by trade; for the Tamils took to the sea very early. By the second century BC they twice invaded Ceylon and occupied its north-eastern parts for a while. At about this time they came in touch with South-East Asia; in the first century AD their contact with the Western world grew through a flourishing trade.

A catalytic agent in the transformation of chiefdoms into inchoate states may have been the contact between north India and the southern tip of the peninsula. Traders, conquerors and Jaina, Buddhist and brahmana missionaries who carried along with them the elements of their material culture promoted interaction between the north and the south. The evidence of this contact begins to be available from the fourth century BC when Megasthenes refers to the Pandyans. Their territory, he tells us, was famous for pearls and was ruled by a woman; this implies some matriarchal influence in the Pandyan society. The inscriptions of Ashoka unambiguously mention the Cholas, Pandyas, Keralaputras and Satiyaputras as lying outside his empire. Of these the identification of only the Satiyaputras is not known; that of the remaining three is certain. The Chola (Coromandel), Pandya (the south-eastern tip of the peninsula) and Chera or Kerala (Malabar) kingdoms are known to have existed in the post-Maurya period. Kharavela speaks of defeating the Tamil confederacy, which may have consisted of these three kingdoms. In the *Mahabharata* the three kingdoms are stated to have fought at Kurukshetra; this was obviously an attempt to give them antiquity. Although the Shangam texts indicate that the Cheras, Cholas and Pandyas were in continual state of warfare,


INDIA
(C. 200 B.C.– A.D. 300)
INDEX
ANCIENT TOWN
MODERN TOWN
NATIONAL BOUNDARY
BAMIYAN
GANDHARA
KABUL
PURUSHAPURA
TAXILA
Srinagar
SAKALA
Indus R.
MATHURA
SHRAVASTI
AYODHYA
KAUSHAMBI
BANARAS
PATALIPUTRA
GAYA
Ganga R.
Brahmaputra R.
MALWA
KATHIAWAR
VIDISHA
SANCHI
UJJAIN
Narmada R.
Culcutta
BROACH
ELLORA
NASIK
PRATISHTHANA
SOPARA
KARLE
JUNAR
Godavari R.
KARIMNAGAR
Krishna R.
NAGARJUNAKONDA
AMARAVATI
KOLAR
Madras
Cauvery R.
ARIKAMEDU
KAVERIPATTANAM
URAIYUR
MADURAI
RABIAN SEA
BAY OF BENGAL
LAKSHADWEEP (India)
ANDAMAN and NICOBAR ISLANDS (India)
INDIAN OCEAN
SCALE
500 km.
300 miles
N
W
E
S

monarchy tended to stabilize through royal sacrifices, generous gifts to brahmanas who fabricated fictitious ancestry and the bardic paeans which enhanced royal prestige. The most famous of the kings mentioned in the early Shangam texts was the Chola ruler Karikala (second century AD) who founded the Chola capital at Puhar (Kaveripattanam); it emerged as a great centre of trade, especially in cotton. He is said to have led many victorious campaigns and is described in a Shangam text as giving lavish gifts and performing Vedic sacrifices. He enjoyed his life in full.

The political history of India from the first century BC to the third century AD gives a confusing picture of a welter of contending tribes, kings and valiant invaders. Most of the kingdoms in the post-Maurya period were small ones. But the Shaka-Kushanas in the north and north-west and the Satavahanas in the Deccan ruled over large areas. They did not exercise the rigid centralized control over their territories as the Mauryas are believed to have done earlier. The Kushanas entered into feudatory relationships with a number of small kings. They divided their empire into satrapies, each under the administrative jurisdiction of a satrap with whom they entered into a feudatory relationship. They also seem to have practised a hereditary dual rule; in some cases a father and his son ruled at one and the same time. The grandiloquent titles adopted by the Kushanas indicate the existence of many lesser kings, who paid homage and tribute to the paramount ruler. Offering of military service by them was not unlikely because the Shakas and Kushanas were excellent horsemen; they in fact introduced into India a better cavalry and the use of horses on a large scale. The Satavahanas had several vassals such as the Maharathis and Ikshvakus who founded independent kingdoms on the ruins of their overlords.

The centrifugal forces of the post-Maurya period were sought to be counterbalanced by the association of divine elements with the ruler. In the earlier periods gods were often compared with princes; now kings came to be compared with gods. In a Satavahana record Gautamiputa Shatakarni is compared to several gods in prowess. The analogy emphasizes the divine aspects of kingship, which received even greater emphasis in the time of the Guptas. The Kushana rulers also tried to deify themselves, as is clear from their title *devaputra* (son of god). Perhaps under Roman influence, they also followed the

practice of erecting mortuary temples to house statues of dead kings (*devakula*). The cult of the dead king however did not find congenial soil in India. The indigenous writings of the period frequently refer to the divine origin of kingship. But the deification of the king did not substantially add to his authority and administrative hold over the country.

On their part the Satavahanas started the practice of donating land with fiscal and administrative immunities to brahmanas and Buddhist monks, which eventually weakened their central authority. Reference to gifts of land to priests is found in earlier literature, but the earliest inscriptional evidence for a land grant in India belongs to the first century BC, when the Satavahanas bestowed villages (*grama*) on priests for officiating at Vedic sacrifices. Initially such grants were accompanied by exemption from the payment of taxes. But gradually the Satavahanas seem to have also surrendered administrative rights to the donees. In a record of the second century AD the Satavahana ruler Gautamiputra Shatakarni is said to have instructed royal officials not to interfere with the administration of a donated field or village. In such a situation the beneficiaries were free to manage the administrative affairs in the donated areas. The gift villages thus tended to become semi-independent administrative pockets, which enfeebled royal control over the countryside.

Land grants were ostensibly made on religious grounds. But the underlying idea of donating land was to extend the area of cultivation through private efforts. A large number of new settlements, therefore, came into being in the agriculturally rich and fertile areas of the Satavahana territory, their major concentration being around Nasik, Junar, Karle and in the upper Krishna valley around Kolhapur. These settlements provided a much needed resource base for the ports on the western coast which handled the bulk of India's trade with the Mediterranean during the early centuries of the Christian era.

The Satavahanas did not possess the vast bureaucracy of the Mauryas. They could not therefore regulate various economic activities, as the Mauryas had done. The clearing of forests and founding of new settlements under the aegis of the state was not possible, and agricultural expansion depended on individual efforts. A contemporary Buddhist work refers to individual farmers in large numbers working

hard and engaged in cultivation. The investment of physical labour in a piece of unclaimed land made the individual its owner. According to Manu, the most important lawgiver of the period whose injunctions have influenced Indian society for centuries and have created a ferment in our own times, a field belonged to him who first cleared the timber and a deer to him who first wounded it. The principle was very likely enunciated to encourage cultivation of virgin land by private individuals.

From the economic point of view, the most striking development of the period was the thriving trade between India and the Western world. The initial basis for the growth of trade was provided by the Mauryas, who are said to have greatly improved internal communications. To them is attributed the construction of the Royal Highway from Pataliputra to Taxila. Pataliputra was connected by road to Tamralipti (Tamluk) in the Gangetic delta, the chief port for ships sailing to Burma and Ceylon. Land routes to south India however developed after the Mauryas. These were mainly along the river valleys, the coasts and often through mountain passes. Different parts of the country were now connected by trade routes, some leading to Western and Central Asia. Taxila was connected by a highway with Kabul, from where roads went in different directions. The northern route passed through Bactria (north Afghanistan), the Oxus region, the Caspian sea and the Caucasus to the Black Sea. The southern route was from Kandahar and Herat to Ecbatana (later Hamadan in Persia); from there traders travelled overland to the eastern Mediterranean coast. A highway also ran from Kandahar to Persepolis and Susa in Persia. Ships travelling from the western ports followed the coastal route to Aden or Socotra; from there the voyage could be undertaken to the Red Sea. From somewhere near modern Suez goods could be sent overland to Alexandria, which was an important trading centre of the Mediterranean world..According to a persistent view, a landmark in the development of communications was the 'discovery' of the monsoon winds by the Greek sailor Hippalus around AD 46-7 which made the mid-ocean navigation of the Arabian Sea possible, reducing the distance between Indian and West Asian ports. But recent scholarship has treated this with increasing scepticism and one scholar has gone to the extent of dismissing the 'discovery' theory as a 'Roman ethnocentric nonsense'. The Greeks, in fact,

knew of the monsoon 'independently of the mythical feat of Hippalus' The army of Alexander had certainly experienced it and Nearchus, while bringing back his fleet, had to wait for the north-east monsoon before he could set sail. A critical scrutiny of the classical sources has shown that Hippalus is the name of the wind and not of its discoverer. Nevertheless it remains true that the earlier knowledge of the monsoons enabled the Western sailors to give up coastal navigation in favour of crossing the high seas thus opening up a route which, instead of going all round the southern coast of Arabia, came directly to the Gulf of Cambay or to the Deccan.

The influx of peoples from the north-west may have disrupted, for a while, some of the land routes connecting India with Western and Central Asia. But they also gave an impetus to trade. The conquest of north-western India by the Indo-Greeks, Kushanas and the Shakas promoted closer contact with Western and Central Asia. Through Central Asia passed the route (known as the Silk Road because much of the Chinese silk trade was carried through it) which connected China with the West Asian provinces of the Roman empire. Indian merchants participated as intermediaries in the Chinese silk trade. Central Asia therefore acted as a link between India and China. The merchants of north-western India mostly traded with these regions; those of western and southern India concentrated on south Arabia, the Red Sea and Alexandria, which handled the bulk of the Roman trade.

The emergence of the Roman empire as the dominant power in the Western world gave a fillip to India's trade from the first century BC onwards; for the eastern part of the empire became the chief customer of Indian luxury goods. The *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, written by an anonymous Greek navigator (first century AD), gives details of Indian exports to the Roman empire. The main exports were: pepper, pearls, ivory, silk, spikenard, malabathrum, diamonds, saffron, precious stones and tortoise shell. As a result of the Indian export of a variety of spices, especially pepper, Roman cuisine and gastronomy underwent striking changes; this is evident from the celebrated Roman gourmet Apicius' cookbook of the first century. Indian spices, often used as cures in certain fields of medicine, influenced the Roman pharmacopeia. According to Pliny pearls came into general use in Rome after the capture of Alexandria by Augustus.

ASIA

Ancient names are shown thus { SERES / Roma / Rhagae

Modern names are shown thus { *SIAM* / *Tashkurgan* / *Lhasa*

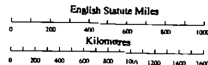
English Statute Miles

0 200 400 600 800 1000

Kilometres

0 200 400 600 800 1000 1200 1400 1600

TRADE ROUTES



Sea-routes, except in Indian Seas, where special lines are used. They are marked thus :— STAGE I etc. in order to show the development in the use of the monsoons.

Roman women not only wore Indian pearls on their fingers and ears but also put them on their shoes. No less was the Roman demand for Indian muslin. Woman decked in seven folds of Indian muslin paraded the streets of Rome. We are told they became a menace to the city's morals. Silk, which was brought from China, was also supplied by Indian merchants to the Roman empire. It was considered so important that the Roman emperor Aurelian declared it to be worth its weight in gold. The frenetic pursuit of luxury in the Roman world aroused the indignation of a section of the ruling class and was a theme of animated debate in the Roman senate. Pliny not only condemned 'the insatiable women's craving for luxuries' but also lamented that this led to a drain of 100 million sesterces of gold from Rome each year, half of it to India alone. Despite an element of exaggeration in Pliny's account, there is little doubt that the Romans sent to India a large quantity of gold and silver coins. No less than one hundred and twenty-nine finds of Roman coins have been reported so far in India, most of them from the peninsula.

In return for her exports India imported from the Roman empire such commodities as topaz, thin cloth, linen, antimony, glassware, copper, tin, lead, wine, realgar, orpiment and wheat. The *Periplus* also tells us of the import of dainty damsels for concubinage in Indian royal establishments. The Roman world exported to India wine amphorae and red glazed Arretine ware, which have been found at Arikamedu (near Pondicherry) and several other places. An important pottery type called the Red Polished Ware found in western India also is believed to have Mediterranean origin. But it is likely that much of the ceramic types found in India were local imitations. The import of bronze objects from the West is attested by the evidence from Ter and Kolhapur (Maharashtra). Similarly archaeology testifies to the import of Roman glass. The Romans also sent to India a large number of gold and silver coins which, as stated earlier, may have been the cause of Pliny's indignation. India was certainly a gainer in its trade with the West. But compared to the Roman or eastern Mediterranean objects found in India, the tangible archaeological evidence of Indian commodities in the West is lacking. Ivory objects of Indian origin have been found in Afghanistan and further west. In Rome itself, however, nothing more than an ivory statuette from Pompeii has been found.

The list of commodities exchanged between India and the Mediterranean world is interesting. But not all Indian export items were available in sufficient quantity within the country to meet the Roman demand, the most important being spices. This scarcity inevitably encouraged trade between India on the one hand and Ceylon and South-East Asia on the other. Ivory, tortoise-shell and other merchandise, Strabo (63 BC-AD 21) tells us, were brought in abundance to the Indian markets from Ceylon. Sandalwood was obtained from eastern Indonesia, cinnamon and cassia from mainland South-East Asia and camphor from the Malay peninsula, Sumatra and Borneo. All this implies that the commerce between India and South-East Asia supported trading activities in the western Indian Ocean.

Connected with the phenomenon of trade was the growth of money economy in the early centuries before and after the Christian era. The imported coins were mostly used as bullion; they may have circulated only in large transactions, if at all. But evidence to prove the development of indigenous currency is not wanting. In the north the Indo-Greeks issued few gold coins; but the Kushanas minted gold in considerable numbers. For day-to-day transactions gold and silver coins could not serve as a medium of exchange; the Satavahanas, however, issued coins in metals of low value, lead or potin. This indicates that money became prevalent in the Deccan and the coastal area. In north and north-western India the Kushanas minted copper coins in large numbers, which may have circulated in ordinary transactions. Copper coins were also issued by the Naga rulers and several other indigenous dynasties. No other period of ancient Indian history is known for so many varieties of coins as this period. This indicates that money economy had penetrated deep into the economic life of the common people.

Trade and coinage were inextricably linked with the process of urbanization. The *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* makes direct reference to quite a few coastal towns. Archaeological evidence however indicates the existence of a large number of towns in different parts of the country. In the north-west Taxila was the most important urban centre; its peak of prosperity is very well documented for the period 200 BC-AD 200. In Jammu and Kashmir twenty-three sites with urban features have been explored; they all belong to the Kushana period. Numerous settlements were founded in the Panjab during this phase. In western Uttar Pradesh Mathura was the most thriving

city during the time of the Kushanas. In the middle Gangetic basin Kaushambi, Varanasi and Pataliputra occupied a pride of place. In Bengal Tamralipti (Tamluk) and Chandraketugarh remained important port-towns until about the third century. In Rajasthan, Viratnagar



Plate 5: Obverse and reverse of (a) coin of Kshaharata Bhumaka from Mathura; (b) coin of Kaniska, son of Huvishka, found at Sonkh, Mathura; and (c) gold coin of Huvishka.

(modern Bairat in Jaipur district) and Madhyamika (modern Nagari in Chittorgarh district) flourished in the early centuries of the Christian era. Tripuri and Eran in Madhya Pradesh, and Maheshwar-Navdatoli in Gujarat were centres of artisanal and trading activity during this period. Many sites excavated in Andhra Pradesh bear evidence of urban occupation during the Satavahana period; most of them participated in India's trade with the outside world. The important among them were Dhulikatta (Karimnagar district), Yeleshwaram (Nalgonda district), Kondapur (Medak district), Dharanikota, Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda (all in Guntur district). In Tamilnadu most urban sites are located in the plains, particularly in the coastal belt. Among them Arikamedu seems to have had the strongest Roman connection, though Kaveripattinam and Uraiyur, both situated in the Kaveri delta, were also important participants in contemporary commercial activities.

Increased commercial activity and the consequent growth of money economy led to a proliferation of arts and crafts. According to the *Mahavastu*, a Buddhist work of about the second century, more than 36 kinds of workers lived in the town of Rajgir. The *Milindapanho* provides a list of 75 occupations, of which nearly 60 were connected with various kinds of crafts. The growth in arts and crafts led to increasing specialization and consequently to the achievement of greater technical skill in certain spheres of production. Thus we are told that out of the 75 occupations listed in the *Milindapanho* 8 were connected with the working of such mineral products as gold, silver, lead, tin, copper, brass, iron and precious stones or jewels. Iron working seems to have made considerable progress, for the *Periplus* refers to Indian iron and steel as imports into the Egyptian ports. The period witnessed a progress in the techniques of textile manufacture. The *Milindapanho* states that Gotami, the aunt of the Buddha, adopted five processes of making cloth. Patanjali testifies to the special celebrity attained by Mathura in the manufacture of textiles, especially *sataka*, a kind of cloth. The influx of Chinese silk into India stimulated the domestic silk industry. Thus considerable technological advance in different sectors of production may be postulated for the post-Maurya period.

Increase in trade demanded an efficient organization of production and distribution. Individual artisans congregated together and formed guilds; merchants also organized themselves into corporations. No

less than two dozen guilds of artisans existed in this period. The guild system seems to have become the general pattern of production, facilitating high output. Inscriptions attest the existence of many of them in the Mathura region, and the western Deccan, where Govardhana was an important centre of guilds of artisans. The guilds sometimes acted as trustees and bankers. A Satavahana record of the second century states that money (in silver *pana*) was deposited by lay devotees of Buddhism with potters, oil-millers and weavers for the purpose of providing robes and other necessities for monks. A contemporary record from Mathura refers to a chief who deposited money with the guild of flour-millers for the maintenance of a hundred brahmanas out of the interest on it. The guilds evidently utilized the capital deposited with them to augment production and paid interest on it out of the proceeds from the sale of their commodities. The possibility of increasing output may have prompted the guilds to hire additional labour, both free labour and slaves. This naturally gave a measure of freedom to artisans and craftsmen.

Presumably because of their wealth, the guilds emerged as an important factor in post-Maurya society. In several cities they seem to have issued coins, which was ordinarily done by sovereign powers. At least five pre-Indo-Greek coins issued by guilds have come to light in the Taxila excavations; they indicate that on the eve of the Greek occupation of Taxila the administration of the city was carried on by a corporation of merchants. The practice of issuing coins by merchant groups seems to have prevailed also in such other towns as Kaushambi, Tripuri (modern Tewar on the Narmada), Mahishmati (modern Mandhata), Vidisha (Madhya Pradesh), Eran (now a village in the Sagar district of Madhya Pradesh), Madhyamika (identified with modern Nagari near Chitor in Rajasthan), Varanasi, etc. Even when the Satavahanas and Kushanas established their kingdom in the first two centuries of the Christian era, the rulers could not ignore the merchant guilds (*nigama sabha*) in the towns of the Deccan, though clear proof of their actual participation in administration is lacking.

Membership of a guild provided status and security to an artisan. The guilds fixed rules of work, quality and the price of the finished products. The behaviour of the guild members was controlled through a guild court. The customary usage of the guild had the force of law for its members. A married woman willing to join the Buddhist

order had to seek the permission of not only her husband but also the guild to which she belonged. Guild laws were protected by the state, as can be inferred from the law-code of Manu. Guilds had their own insignia, banners and seals, which gave them publicity. The most effective method of self-advertisement of the professional guilds was to make liberal religious donations. Smiths, perfumers, weavers, goldsmiths and even leather-workers are said to have donated caves, pillars, tablets, cisterns and other items to Buddhist establishments.

Artisans and craftsmen were largely drawn in this period from the shudras, who gained in wealth and status on account of the progress of crafts and commerce. With the disappearance of the Maurya state, which regulated all economic activities, the guilds became powerful and perhaps secured a certain measure of independence for artisans. The economic distinctions between the vaishyas and the shudras thus tended to be blurred. But most of the artisans were confined to the urban centres like Taxila and Mathura in the north and the coastal towns and their hinterlands in the Deccan and the south. It is therefore difficult to postulate any major change in the living conditions of the class of the shudras. Generally they continued to be employed as hired labour and slaves. The lawgiver Manu laid down a number of laws which adversely affected their economic position; in his view the shudras were meant for serving the upper *varnas*. In cases of assault and similar crimes the punishments prescribed for them were very harsh. According to Manu, the very limb with which a man of a low caste hurt a member of the highest caste was to be cut off. If, for example, a shudra insulted a twice-born with gross invective, he would have his tongue cut out. Legally, a member of a higher *varna* could marry a woman of a lower order. But Patanjali tells us that the *dasi* (maid servant) and *vrishali* (shudra woman) were meant for the pleasures of men of the upper classes. Most shudras seethed in discontent. It is not unlikely that they often turned against brahmanas and other higher castes and caused tension in society. This can be inferred from several early Puranic passages of the late third and early fourth century which indicate that society was passing through a crisis known as the Kaliyuga and that the institutions of family, private property and the *varna* system were under attack. Therefore the law givers not only provided a number of safeguards against shudra hostility but also for protection of the brahmanical patriarchal

social institutions. They laid down inheritance rules which deprived women of their right to property and lowered the age of marriage, which took away their freedom to choose their husbands. As an unmarried girl a woman had to depend on her father, as a wife on her husband and as a widow on her son. She was, according to Manu, a seductress.

The stringent legal injunctions laid down by Manu may be viewed as an effort to protect a traditional *varna* order now in close contact with alien peoples, often known in Indian sources as Yavanas and whose settlements in the north-western India existed even in earlier times. The vast body of Kharoshthi inscriptions of the early Christian centuries found in this region do not mention the term Yavana, but many names occurring in them are surely of Greek origin. Similarly numerous Kushana finds, such as coins, terracottas and sculptures, indicate that they came in considerable numbers. In western India, the high visibility of the alien Yavanas, in the donative records at Karle makes their presence in its vicinity unquestionable. In south India also, most of the urban centres, which prospered on foreign trade, had by now considerable numbers of Yavanas. The Shangam poems make repeated references to them. In the city of Kaveripattanam (situated at the mouth of the river Kaveri), we are told, the onlooker's attention was caught by their abodes. The presence in India of foreigners who achieved political and economic importance posed a threat to the caste system. Brahmana orthodoxy could not dub them as outcastes; on the contrary it had to come to terms with them, as is evident in the *Mahabharata*. At one place in this text they are described as the sons of Yayati and at another they are said to have sprung from the body of Vasishtha's cow together with the Pahlavas. In one passage the Yavanas are degraded as shudras and in another Indra says that they can be admitted into the brahmanical social order if they follow the brahmanical *dharma*. Mutually contradictory though these statements may appear, they are all indicative of efforts to assimilate them into Indian society. Shrewdly enough, the lawgiver Manu conferred the status of 'fallen kshatriyas' (*vratya kshatriya*) on them.

The absorption of foreigners into Indian society was made easier through the adoption of Buddhism, which did not raise difficulties about caste. This explains why a number of foreign rulers patronized the religion of the Buddha. The Indo-Greek Agathocles displayed

Buddhist symbols on his coins, and so did Menander. Several gifts by individuals of Greek origin are known to have been made. One Irila built two cisterns for monks at Junar; Chitta constructed a meeting hall for the Samgha at the same place. Indragnidata excavated a cave at Nasik, and Dhenukakata built a temple at Karle. The Kushanas, Kanishka especially, also made munificent donations to Buddhist establishments. In their time a number of missions were sent abroad, and Buddhism came into contact with the foreign peoples. In the process of proselytizing Buddhism received new ideas. This however was not true of the brahmanical religion; the only important evidence of its following among non-Indians is perhaps the pillar inscription (*c.* 120–100 BC) of the Graeco-Bactrian king Antialkidas' ambassador Heliodorus at Vidisha.

Indigenous support for Buddhism came mainly from the mercantile community, which was by all accounts prosperous. Many *stupas* and monasteries of this period owed their existence to the charity of merchants. Through trade Buddhism travelled to Western and Central Asia, China and South-East Asia. Within the country, most Buddhist



Plate 6: Anathapindika's gift of Jetavana to Buddha showing the water vessel essential for pouring water to make the gift. Bharhut, Central India, Sunga period, second century BC. Indian Museum, Calcutta.

cave monasteries were situated along trade routes running through the well-marked mountain passes of the western Ghats. Evidently located at important stages on the journey, these abbeys served as resting places, supply houses and banking houses for caravans.

As a result of lavish donations the Buddhist monasteries tended to become repositories of wealth. Some of the cells in the main body of the *vihara* at Karle and several other places in the Deccan have inner compartments without light or ventilation; these may have been used for safe-keeping of precious goods. Most of the outer cells had strong wooden doors which could be barred from within and locked from without. All this indicates the presence of substantial wealth in the monasteries. Some of the recorded gifts to Buddhist monasteries were made by monks and nuns. At Sanchi, for example, out of more than six hundred recorded donations two hundred were made by them. That they had the money for donations shows that they flouted the earlier Buddhist canon, which required a new entrant into the order to give away all his possessions and then renounce worldly life. The reinterpretation of the doctrine of the Buddha was thus rendered inevitable when the renouncer became a parasite of the renounced.

Differences over what really constituted the teachings of the Buddha had begun soon after his death. Attempts had been made to maintain the unity of the order through a series of councils, though without much success. By the time of Kanishka as many as eighteen Buddhist sects are said to have come into being. According to tradition, during the time of Kanishka the fourth Buddhist council was held in Kashmir, where the first great schism of Buddhism was recognized. The more orthodox adherents of the religion claimed that theirs was the original teaching of the Buddha; they were called the Hinayana sect or the followers of the Lesser Vehicle. In course of time Hinayana Buddhism became popular in Ceylon, Burma and the countries of South-East Asia. The Mahayanists (the followers of the Mahayana or the Greater Vehicle) dominated in India, Central Asia, Tibet, China and Japan. One of the outstanding early exponents of Mahayanism was Nagarjuna, a convert from a northern Deccan brahmana family.

The hallmark of the Mahayana was the Bodhisattva doctrine, which was a logical development of the earlier Buddhist ideas. According to the older doctrine the Bodhisattva lived in wisdom and love and wrought many deeds of kindness and mercy, and ultimately became

the Buddha. Ordinary believers were therefore encouraged to emulate him and attain *nirvana*. But in the Mahayanist thought the Bodhisattva was one who worked selflessly for the good of all mankind and bided his time until all living beings could achieve the goal. The older Buddhism had regarded individual salvation as the goal; the new doctrine had as its objective the salvation of all beings.

The Bodhisattva was conceived as a previous incarnation of the Buddha; this led to the belief that one could accumulate spiritual merit through successive births. Logically enough the Mahayana emphasized that merit was transferable from one person to another; numerous Buddhist dedicatory records indicate that this could be done through a pious act in the name of a person to whom merit was to be transferred.

The Bodhisattva of the Mahayana was not only a spirit of compassion but also of suffering, who redeemed humanity through his own suffering. A belief current in West Asia at that time was evidently borrowed by the Mahayana Buddhism: from the idea of the 'suffering saviour' was derived the concept of Maitreya Buddha, who would appear in future to redeem mankind. The Mahayana created in course of time a pantheon of noble and beneficient Bodhisattvas, who claimed the faith and allegiance of the devotees. The Buddha himself came to be increasingly looked upon as the earthly manifestation of a mighty spiritual being. He was elevated from a religious teacher to a saviour god. The worship of the image of the Buddha with elaborate rituals, formulae and charms soon took the place of the earlier simple faith in him—a development which the founder of the religion would have loathed. The earlier practice of worshipping the symbols of the Buddha continued, but his image became increasingly common from around the turn of the Christian era. One of the earliest specimens of the Buddha image, conjecturally dated to the first century BC, comes from Mathura. The Buddha was transformed into a personal god, to whom his followers could pray for succour in distress. As a result the doctrine of *bhakti* (loving devotion) evolved as a characteristic feature of the Mahayana Buddhism. Thus the Buddhism that evolved after the meeting of the fourth Buddhist council was strikingly different from the original conception of its founder.

Like Buddhism, Jainism also did not remain unchanged. The

religion suffered a split towards the end of the first century AD. The orthodox Jainas came to be known as the Digambaras (sky clad) and the liberal ones as Shvetambaras (white-clad). From Magadha Jainas moved westwards to Mathura and then to Ujjain and finally settled in Saurashtra. They also migrated to Kalinga, where under Kharavela they enjoyed royal patronage for a while. Like Buddhism, Jainism also developed image worship. The Hathigumpha inscription refers to the removal of a Jina image from Kalinga to Pataliputra as early as the time of the Magadhan king Nanda and to its recovery by Kharavela (in the first century BC). Several well-carved Jaina images and votive tablets with Jina figures have been discovered at Mathura, but on the whole Jainism remained conservative.

The growing popularity of Buddhism and other heterodox sects went against Vedic sacrifice and animal slaughter. The heretical attack on Vedic institutions and sacrifices seriously undermined the prestige and authority of the brahmanas, who therefore appropriated popular cults with significant followings. In the process brahmanical religion underwent important changes: most of the Vedic gods passed into oblivion and their place was taken by a trinity of gods, with Brahma as the creator, Vishnu as the preserver and Shiva as the destroyer of the evil-ridden world. In course of time Vishnu and Shiva emerged as the most important gods of the brahmanical pantheon. Their devotees later constituted two separate sects.

Vishnu was thought of as the supreme god. After Brahma created the universe Vishnu, who had been sleeping in the primeval ocean on the thousand-headed snake Shesha, awoke to reign from the highest heaven Vaikuntha. From there he observes the world; when evil is rampant he appears in various incarnations (*avataras*) to save mankind. Perhaps this idea was borrowed from the Bodhisattva doctrine of Buddhism. It may have evolved with the identification of Vishnu with Krishna, who is mentioned in the *Rigveda* as a demon and an enemy of Indra. By the early centuries of the Christian era Krishna was the incarnation of Vishnu and the fountain-head of all religious philosophy, goading Arjuna to fight against his Kuru cousins on the battlefield and pulling strings offstage most of the time in the *Mahabharata*.

Shiva, mentioned by Megasthenes as Dionysus, evolved from the Rigvedic god Rudra and the Tamil god Murugan, though his Tamil

antecedents are sometimes doubted. A number of non-Aryan fertility cults, such as those of the phallic emblem (*lingam*) and the bull (*nandi*), merged with the worship of of Shiva. The earliest evidence of the phallic cult goes back to the Harappan period. It was incorporated into Brahmanism around the beginning of the Christian era, and Shiva has since been worshipped chiefly in the form of a *linga*. Yet Shiva is worshipped in human form as well. One of the earliest representations of him in human form comes from the village Gudimallam (in Andhra Pradesh), where a 1.5 m high and extremely realistic emblem bears upon it a malformed dwarf on whose shoulders stands the two-armed god, holding a ram in his right hand, and a water vessel and battle axe in the left one, with his sex mark prominently shown below the diaphanous loin cloth.

Simultaneously with the emergence of these gods, Brahmanism was assimilating a variety of popular cults. Animals, trees, mountains and rivers came to acquire divine associations. The cow became an object of worship; the seeds of modern communal Indian politics were thus sown. After the cow, the snake was the most revered animal; originally it was the centre of primitive fertility rites. The Vaikuntha mountain became sacred to Vishnu, as Kailasha to Shiva. Vaikuntha, thought to be situated in the highest heavens has not been identified; Kailasha is generally recognized as a peak in the central Himalaya. Tree cults were also absorbed into the brahmanical faith. The *pipal* or *ashvattha* and the *vata* (banyan) were especially sacred trees. The *tulasi* or a holy basil plant was sacred to Vishnu. It is still grown in the courtyards of traditional Hindu homes; Krishna, an incarnation of Vishnu, is still married every year at a fixed date to the goddess Vrinda who is represented by this plant. The waters of the Ganga were held sacred; in the myths the river is said to have sprung from the foot of Vishnu and fallen to earth through the matted locks of Shiva. Most of the above-mentioned cults had roots in primitive popular beliefs and practices and have survived to our own day.

The brahmanical religion, which evolved through a process of syncretism with popular cults, was based on the doctrine of *bhakti*. Borrowed from Buddhism, it preached that a completely personal relationship between the god and his devotee was possible through devotion and not just by performing sacrifice. Devotion was to arise

from unflinching faith; not surprisingly Krishna, despite his rather questionable personal track record, was accepted as the incarnation of the supreme Vishnu. The concept of *bhakti* was first expounded clearly ostensibly by Krishna himself in the *Bhagavadgita*.

In spite of a gradual shift in emphasis from ritual to devotion as the means of attaining nearness to god, Vedic sacrifice was not entirely rejected. The people, however, were gradually losing touch with the Vedic tradition. The religious importance previously enjoyed by the Vedic texts now came to be attached to the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* and the Puranas. The Epics were bardic in origin and secular in character. They had therefore to be revised by the brahmanas so as to give them a religious character. The process took several centuries and resulted in substantial interpolations in their original kernel. The most important interpolation was the *Gita*, which has been dated around the second century BC. It contains 700 tightly woven stanzas, which provide the first clear exposition of the basic tenets of the Vaishnava faith. No wonder the *Gita* later became the basic text of the Vaishnavas. In our own times it is talked about more often than read, its glaring contradictions and poetic excellence being conveniently ignored by those who tirelessly swear by it.

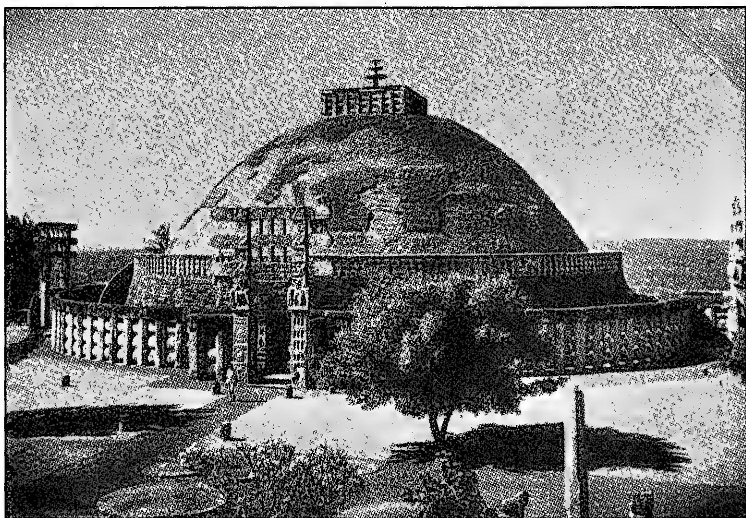


Plate 7: Stupa I (Great Stupa). Sanchi, Madhya Pradesh, *c.* third century BC through first century AD.

The brahmanical religion was still in its formative stage. Art therefore centred round Buddhism. Much wealth was spent on it by rich merchants, guilds and kings. The artistic remains of the period consist chiefly of Buddhist *stupas* and cave temples. The *stupa* began as a pre-Buddhist burial mound; by the time of Ashoka the cult of the *stupa* had been taken up by Buddhism. It was a hemishpherical dome built over the relics of the Buddha or a sanctified monk or a sacred text. The relic was placed in a central chamber at the base of the *stupa*, which was surrounded by a path and enclosed by railings. Of surviving *stupa* railings the earliest comes from Bharhut and dates to the second century BC. At about the same time the older Sanchi *stupa* was renovated and enlarged to twice its original size. The *stupa* of Amaravati, larger and more ornate than the one at Sanchi, seems to have been completed by about the second century AD.

The chief architectural remains of the period, other than *stupas*



Plate 8: Interior of Chaitya hall. Karle, Maharashtra. Kshaharata, Shaka period, *c.* AD 120.

and their surrounding gateways with railings, consist of the cave temples whose beginnings may be ascribed to the reign of Ashoka. Dug in hill-sides, caves were used as shrines, temples or dwellings by the monks. In the western Deccan, under the Satavahanas and their successors, the largest and the most famous of artificial caves were excavated, the oldest in the area being at Bhaja near Poona. Roughly contemporaneous with the Bhaja caves may be a part of the group of early Buddhist caves at Pitalkhora. The structure at Karle, dating probably to the early second century AD, is the finest example of the more elaborate and ornate cave architecture. The Karle cave has a rectangular entrance leading into a *chaitya* hall (meeting hall of Buddhist monks and lay worshippers), which also is rectangular. This is cut about 37 m deep into the solid rock, with an apse at one end containing a miniature *stupa*; its width is 14 m. Its ceiling rises 13 m above the floor and has rock-cut ribs, which were an imitation of the



Plate 9: Female terracotta figure. From Tamluk, West Bengal, Sunga period, *c*. second-first century BC. Ht: 21 cm. Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

barrel-vaulting of a wooden building. The rock-cut sanctuaries grew in size and splendour over time, as can be seen at Ajanta and Ellora (both near Aurangabad in Maharashtra), where some of the caves belong to this period. The only surviving examples of wall paintings from this period are found at Ajanta in a rock-cut *chaitya* hall, which goes back to the second or the first century BC. The Jainas also had their cave temples, notable among them being those at Udayagiri/ Khandagiri hills near Bhuvaneswar in Orissa. They were, however, not as elaborate as those of the Buddhists.

Sculpture functioned mainly as ornamentation of the gateways and rails of the great Buddhist sites at Bharhut, Gaya and Sanchi. Sculptural remains at these places represent different stages in the evolution of the art; those at Sanchi, perhaps latest in the series, show the highest degree of excellence in contrast to the Bharhut

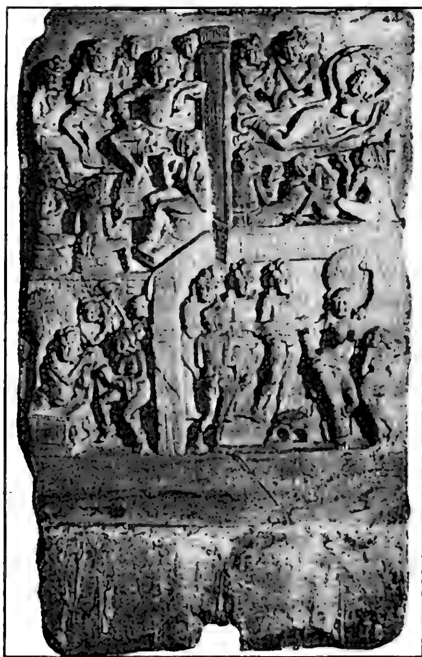


Plate 10: Life events of Shakyamuni Buddha. Amaravati, Andhra Pradesh, Satavahana period, *c.* second century. White marble. Ht: 160 cm. British Museum, London.

specimens which are archaic and uncertain in their treatment of the theme. The northern and mid-Indian plastic tradition was carried to Amaravati and the Deccan caves, where considerable mastery of sculpture was achieved by about the second century AD. The devotees of Jainism patronized a school of sculpture at Mathura; here at an early period the artists working for centuries in the white-spotted red sandstone of the locality, produced votive plaques depicting the cross-legged naked figure of a Tirthankara in meditation. The Mathura school, as it came to be known, is said to have begun at the end of the first century BC. Later it received the patronage of the Kushana kings, some of whose portrait statues have also been discovered near Mathura, the most well known being a statue of Kanishka of which only the headless trunk has survived. Mathura produced the first image of the Buddha, his presence in the earlier *stupas* being indicated



Plate 11: Kanishka. Mathura, Uttar Pradesh, Kushan period, reign of Kanishka or later *c.* second century. Reddish sandstone. Ht: 170 cm. Mathura Museum, Mathura.



Plate 12: Woman with a bird cage. From a railing pillar, Bhutesar, Mathura, Kushana period, second century AD. Red sandstone. Ht: 129 cm. Indian Museum, Calcutta.



Plate 13: Vedika pillar with Greek warrior. Bharhut, Madhya Pradesh, Sunga period, *c.* 100–80 BC. Reddish brown sandstone. Indian Museum, Calcutta.

by symbols; it had not yet become the home town of the many-faceted Krishna whose earliest artistic portrayal (belonging to around the fifth century) is found at a place called Arra near Varanasi. In technique and artistic execution the Mathura craftsmen owed a great deal to the earlier Indian tradition. But they also borrowed more than one Graeco-Roman motif from Gandhara in the north-west, where a distinct and prolific school of art flourished from about the middle of the first century BC to the fifth century AD. The Mathura



Plate 14: Standing Buddha. From Bactro-Gandhara region, Pakistan, Kushana period. Ht: 150 cm approx. Lahore Museum, Lahore.

tradition inspired another school of art, that of Sarnath, in the succeeding period.

The Gandhara school, often called Graeco-Buddhist, was influenced less by Greek than by Roman art. It enjoyed its period of greatest prosperity under the Kushana emperors. The subject-matter of Gandhara art was predominantly Buddhist, but many of the sculptural motifs are of Hellenistic or Roman derivation. The mother of the Buddha resembled the Athenian matron. Many early Gandhara Buddhas have Apollonian faces, their draperies arranged in the style of a Roman *toga*. Stucco (lime-plaster) for sculpture was in use in the Gandhara region as early as the first century AD. By the third century it largely replaced stone as the material for the decoration of *stupas* and *viharas*.

Though lacking in the dignity and finesse of a major art such as sculpture, terracotta was a commonly and popularly used medium of artistic expression. From the period of the Shungas and Kanvas a large number of terracotta female figures have survived. Richly dressed and slim, these have heavy countenance, modelled busts and well disciplined bodies. Some finds, with a marked Shaka-Kushana impress, exhibit a great variety of ethnic tribal and nomad fashions, especially prominent in the male figures from Mathura. This must have been the result of the influx of the peoples who came to India in the post-Maurya period with new fashions and tastes. To the south of the Vindhyas rich terracotta material has come to light at Maski in Andhra Pradesh. The large-scale production of terracottas has been linked with the rise of urban centres during this period. But it is difficult to question their association with folk traditions and their value as source of styles appearing in stone sculptures 'seemingly without precedent'

Literary activity at the turn of the Christian era took various forms. The *Gathasaptashati*, an anthology of 700 self-contained graceful stanzas on varying forms of love in a rural setting, is the finest output in Prakrit. It is said to have been written by a shadowy Satavahana king Hala, though additions continued to be made to it up to the sixth century. Several Buddhist texts dealing with the life of the Buddha give ample proof of the intermixture of Prakrit and Sanskrit. In spite of this hybridization, Sanskrit emerged as the chief medium of literary expression of all kinds. Around the middle of the second

century BC Patanjali wrote the *Mahabhashya*, a commentary on the earliest extant Sanskrit grammar of Panini. Patanjali formulated certain new grammatical rules (*ishtis*) to supplement the earlier ones; this would mean that Sanskrit had by now undergone changes. Medical treatises were written, the most famous being that of Charaka, a contemporary of Kanishka. Another work of this class, attributed to Sushruta, belongs to a slightly later date. The science of medicine benefited much from India's contacts with the Western world, and so did astronomy. Several legal texts were compiled in this period. The *Manusmriti*, which has remained the most influential instrument of brahmanical ideology in Indian society, belongs to the period 200 BC-AD 200. It was during this period that the brahmanas began to redact the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* and the Puranas, which contain much legal lore. Hundreds of verses are common to the *Manusmriti* and the *Mahabharata*. The *Natyashastra*, attributed to the sage Bharata, is the first important work on drama, music and dance; according to some scholars it was composed during the early centuries of the Christian era. The earliest surviving Sanskrit poetry in the classical style is that of the Buddhist Ashvaghosha, a contemporary of Kanishka. He wrote a poem on the life of the Buddha, the *Buddhacharita*, which has come down to us with later interpolations. Another poetical composition by him, the *Saundarananda*, deals with the conversion of the Buddha's half brother to Buddhism. Ashvaghosha was also the first playwright in Sanskrit. His drama survives in fragments discovered in a monastery in Turfan (Central Asia). But the oldest complete plays are those written by Bhasa. The finest of his thirteen plays (discovered in Kerala in 1912) is the *Svapanavasavadattam*, its theme drawn from the ancient Udayan romance.

Ashvaghosha and Bhasa wrote in an ornate style perhaps for courtly circles. From now on Sanskrit tended to be ostentatious, simple words giving way to compounded ones. Already a virtual monopoly of the brahmanas, Sanskrit now gradually became the language of the ruling class. Even royal inscriptions came to be written in classical ornate style. The earliest royal inscription in classical Sanskrit belongs to the Shaka king Rudradaman (dated AD 150), who takes pride in his mastery over the language. Later it came to be increasingly adopted in royal charters. Prakrit, the language close to popular speech and

used by the Maurya and Satavahana rulers, was thus replaced by Sanskrit, though in northern Tamilnadu and adjoining areas the early Pallava rulers issued their copper-plate charters in Prakrit during the third-fourth centuries; the distinct Tamil linguistic tradition was still to take its form and was not yet in a position to become a substitute for the north Indian literary idiom.

In Tamilnadu the earliest evidence of writing is provided by more than seventy-five short inscriptions in the Brahmi script, which are found in the Jaina and the Buddhist caves in the Madurai region and contain several examples of Tamil adaptations of Sanskrit and Pali or Prakrit terms. These inscriptions belong to the period *c.* 200 BC–AD 300, which coincides with the initial phase of the growth of the earliest Tamil literature called the Shangam literature. This literature grew independently of the Sanskrit literary tradition. But its development was not in total isolation; for some of the poets were brahmanas through whom Sanskritic ideas entered Tamil literature. According to tradition many centuries ago three successive assemblies (Shangams) were held at the Pandyan capital Madurai. At these assemblies, lasting for 9,990 years, gathered all the poets and bards, whose compositions constituted the Shangam literature. But the predominantly folk character of the Shangam poems indicates that most were produced by bards who roamed about singing the praise of their patron chieftains; only some were composed by scholarly poets who followed the bardic tradition. Kapilar, Paranar, Avvayar and Gautamanar were well-known scholarly poets (*pulavar*) as distinct from common bards (*panar*). Tamil bardic poetry and other Shangam works were already in existence as a floating mass of folk literature in this period and the assemblies of poets and scholars—if such assemblies were ever convened—possibly redacted it as classified anthologies. Of the whole corpus of early Tamil literature the *Ettutogai* (*Eight Anthologies*) and the *Pattupattu* (*Ten Idylls*) are the most archaic, though the terminal date of their anthologization may be placed somewhere around the third century AD. The compilation of the earliest work dealing with Tamil grammar and poetics, the *Tolkappiyam*, also cannot be pushed back further than this, though some portions of it may belong to a slightly earlier period. The *Patinenkizkanakku*, the eighteen didactic texts including the famous *Tirukkural* by Tiruvalluvar, have been assigned to a period later than the third century AD. The twin

Tamil epics *Silapadikaram* and *Manimekalai*, which do not strictly belong to the group of works of the Shangam but are often associated with it by some scholars, cannot be dated earlier than the sixth century AD. Disputes about the stratification of the Shangam texts may remain unresolved for many years to come. What however is difficult to question is that compared with classical Sanskrit literature, the early Tamil literature was closer to the realities of life.

CHAPTER 8

The Myth of the Golden Age

THE ECLIPSE OF the Kushanas in north India and of the Satavahanas in the Deccan in the third century ushered in a period of political atomism and paved the way for the emergence of several minor powers and new ruling families. It was in this situation that the Guptas laid the foundation of an empire. Their origin and original home cannot be determined with certainty. But it is likely that they began their career as subordinates of one of the branches of the later Kushanas and acquired political control in the region of Magadha in the second decade of the fourth century. The first two Guptas, Shrigupta and Ghatotkacha, were rulers of no consequence and are known only through respectful mention by Chandragupta I, the real founder of the Gupta line. By marrying a Lichchhavi princess Chandragupta I sought to gain in prestige, though Vaishali does not appear to have been a part of his kingdom. His rule remained confined to Magadha and parts of eastern Uttar Pradesh (Saketa and Prayaga). He took the title of *maharajadhiraja*, and his accession in about AD 319-20 marks the beginning of the Gupta era.

Chandragupta I was succeeded by his son Samudragupta probably in 325. Samudragupta became the ruler after subduing his rival Kacha, an obscure prince of the dynasty. His conquests are known from a lengthy eulogy (*prashasti*) composed by his court poet Harishena and engraved on an Ashokan pillar at Allahabad. This panegyric in elegant Sanskrit is a loud, if posthumous, announcement of the triumphs of Samudragupta. It informs us that he uprooted Achyuta of Ahichchhatra, Nagasena of Padmavati (modern Padam Pawaya in Madhya Pradesh), and Ganapatinaga in Mathura; he also captured a prince of the Kota family (Bulandshahr area). This is followed by an impressive list of kings and tribes who were conquered and brought under various degrees of subjection. Twelve kings of Dakshinapatha are said to have

been captured and then liberated and reinstated. Eight kings of Aryavarta (northern India) are described as having been 'violently exterminated' The forest states (*atavirajyas*) of central India and the Deccan, chiefs of the five border states and nine tribal principalities in Rajasthan were forced to pay tribute and taxes to Samudragupta and obey his orders. Foreign kings, such as the Daivaputra Shahanushahi (descendant of the 'Son of Heaven, King of Kings' indicating a Kushana title), the Shakas, and the ruler of Ceylon are referred to in the Allahabad inscription as paying tribute.

The states which are stated to have succumbed to the power of Samudragupta make a fairly long list and would cover a large part of the subcontinent. But it is generally believed that Samudragupta exercised direct administrative control only over northern India. The kings of the Deccan and the south merely paid him homage; the Shakas in western India seem to have remained unconquered. The tribal 'republican' states of Rajasthan and the Panjab were not directly administered by him, though he certainly and finally broke their power. Samudragupta's claim to have subjugated the Kushanas has been questioned, though their power was surely on the wane. A Chinese source tells us that king Meghavarna of Ceylon (352-79) sent presents to the emperor and sought his permission to build a monastery at Gaya. This hardly justifies the tributary status of the Ceylonese king. At any rate Samudragupta did carve out an empire, for he performed an *ashvamedha* sacrifice.

It appears from the Allahabad panegyric that Samudragupta was not only a conqueror but also a great poet, musician and patron of learning. His poetical compositions have not survived, but his love of music is attested by his gold coins which represent him as playing the *vina*. It has been suggested that he was the patron of the great Buddhist scholar Vasubandhu, though some scholars doubt this.

The empire of Samudragupta was further extended and consolidated by Chandragupta II, who ruled from 375 to 415. The *Devichandraguptam* of Vishakhadatta tells us that Ramagupta succeeded Samudragupta. He was defeated by the Shakas to whom he agreed to surrender his wife Dhruvadevi. His younger brother Chandra protested against this and went to the Shaka king. This led to an estrangement between the two brothers. Eventually Chandragupta killed his elder brother and married his widow Dhruvadevi. Coins of Ramagupta

have been found near Bhilsa, and some inscriptions prove that the wife of Chandragupta was Dhruvadevi. This lends credence to the story of the *Devichandraguptam*.

Chandragupta II's campaign against the Shakas resulted in their final defeat and the annexation of western India to the Gupta empire. The western boundaries of the empire became secure for sometime, and the Guptas gained control over the ports of western India. Chandragupta II entered into matrimonial alliance with a number of royal dynasties. He married Kuvernaga of the Naga family and had a daughter by her named Prabhavatigupta. She was given in marriage to Rudrasena II of the Vakataka dynasty, which ruled over what was previously the stronghold of the Satavahanas in central India. After the death of her husband she ruled as regent from 390 to 410. The Vakataka kingdom thus became virtually a part of the Gupta dominions. It is likely that the Kadamba ruler Kakutsthavarman, ruling over the Kuntala region (Konkan), gave his daughters in marriage to the Guptas.Chandragupta II took the title of Vikramaditya or the Sun of Prowess. His reign is often remembered not for wars but for his patronage of art and literature. Kalidasa, the great Sanskrit poet and playwright, is said to have lived in his court.

Kumaragupta (415-54) succeeded his father Chandragupta II. A branch of the Hunas from Central Asia had occupied Bactria, and were threatening to cross the Hindukush mountains. But they remained a distant threat during his rule. On the whole Kumaragupta's reign remained peaceful.

The Huna threat materialized in the reign of Kumaragupta's successors, to whom fell the real task of defending the empire. Skandagupta fought them bravely but the situation became complicated owing to several domestic problems. His feudatories seem to have asserted themselves, and his debased coins indicate a deep economic crisis in the empire. But he rallied his forces against the Hunas and appears to have won the battle.

The death of Skandagupta in about 467 was followed by a succession of several kings who could not keep the empire intact. A major blow to Gupta power came towards the end of the fifth century, when the Hunas entered north India in large numbers. Excellent archers and skilful horsemen familiar with metal stirrups, the Hunas hastened the disintegration of the empire, and within the

next half century it gave way to a number of kingdoms.

The dissolution of the tottering Gupta empire coincides with the establishment of the Huna kingdom in north India as far as Eran in Madhya Pradesh. The first important Huna king was Toramana; a colossal representation of Varaha, the boar incarnation of Vishnu, shown as a four-legged theriomorph dated in his first regnal year, is found at Eran. He is said to have been converted to Jainism. In AD 515 he was succeeded by his son Mihirakula, who ruled from Sakala (Sialkot). Tradition speaks of him as a tyrant, an iconoclast and a persecutor of the Buddhists, but he was also a devout Shaiva who founded the temple of Mihireshvara. Mihirakula was defeated by Yashodharman of Malwa and Narasimhagupta Baladitya of the Gupta dynasty in succession. But the collapse of the Huna power did not lead to the revival of the empire of the Guptas.

The disintegration of Gupta power cannot be fully explained by the Huna invasion. Perhaps it was the inevitable result of the manner in which the empire was organized. Unlike the Mauryas, the Guptas adopted such pompous titles as *maharadhiraja, parameshvara, parama-bhattaraka, paramadvaita* and *chakravarti*, which imply the existence of lesser kings with considerable authority within the empire. The major part of the territory conquered by the Guptas was ruled by such feudatories as the Parivrajaka and Uchchhakalpa princes in central India and many others subdued by Samudragupta. Only Bengal, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, which formed the nucleus of the empire, were directly under imperial rule. The leading feudatories of the Gupta emperors were the Maitrakas of Valabhi, the Vardhanas of Thaneswar, the Maukharis of Kanauj, the Later Guptas of Magadha, and the Chandras of Bengal. As soon as the opportunity presented itself, they asserted their independence, reducing the empire to a mere shadow.

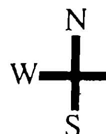
In contrast to the Mauryas, the Guptas do not seem to have possessed a large professional army. The record which glorifies Samudragupta for his all-round conquests, does not tell us anything about his military apparatus. Nor does Fa-hsien indicate the numerical strength of the Gupta army. Probably troops supplied by the feudatories constituted the major portion of Gupta military strength. Also, the Guptas did not enjoy a monopoly of elephants and horses, essential components of an ancient military machinery. All this led to the

THE GUPTA EMPIRE AT THE CLOSE OF THE FOURTH CENTURY

INDEX

GUPTA EMPIRE	(thick line)
ANCIENT TOWN	O
MODERN TOWNS	O
NATIONAL BOUNDARY	(dash-dot line)
OTHER POWERS	*MADRAS*

Srinagar
MADRAS
YAUDHEYAS
THANESAR
DELHI
Indus R.
MATHURA
GURJARAS
MALAVAS
AYODHYA
PRAYAG
KASHI
VAISALI
Ganga R.
Brahmaputra R.
KAMARUPA
SINDH
PATALIPUTRA
MANDASOR
UJJAIN
SANCHI
Culcutta
VALABHI
Narmada R.
TAMRALIPTI
SAMATATA
VAKATAKAS
AJANTA
Godavari R.
Bombay
BAY OF BENGAL
SALANKAYANAS
ARABIAN SEA
Krishna R.
VENGI
KADAMBAS
LAKSHADWEEP (India)
GANGAS
Madras
KANCHI
Cauvery R.
PALLAVAS
PANDYAS
ANDAMAN and NICOBAR ISLANDS (India)
SCALE
500 km.
300 miles
INDIAN OCEAN



increasing dependence on feudatories, who wielded considerable authority at least on the fringes of the empire.

Nor did the Guptas possess an elaborate and organized bureaucracy. The cadre which supplied superior officers was that of the *kumaramatyas*. It was from among them that such important officers as the *mantri* (minister), *senapati* (military commander), *maha-dandanayaka* (minister of justice), *sandhivigrahika* (minister of war and peace) were recruited. High officers were often appointed by the king. But several offices were often combined in the hands of the same person. Harishena, the composer of the Allahabad panegyric of Samudragupta, held several important portfolios. Administrative posts also tended to become hereditary, which led to the weakening of the royal control over administration.

Decentralization of administrative authority was caused by an increase in the granting of land and villages to priests and temples, which had begun in the Sạtavahana period and gained in strength during the rule of the Vakatakas, though their overlords, the Guptas, have very few such grants to their credit. The beginning of the practice of making religious grants roughly synchronizes with the date of the earliest epic and Puranic descriptions of the Kaliyuga or the age of social crisis marked, among other things, by a sharp antagonism between the higher and the lower *varnas* resulting in the refusal of the shudras to perform producing functions and of the vaishyas to pay taxes. In such a situation, the state, it has been suggested, gave up the earlier practice of collecting taxes directly through its agents and paying its priestly, military and other employees for their services. It now found it convenient to assign revenues directly to those who needed to be paid by the state for their services. Initially priests and religious establishments were the main beneficiaries of land and village grants, but in subsequent times, roughly from the seventh-eighth centuries onwards, military chiefs and different categories of administrators and officers came to be assigned land or villages for their services. Increasing popularity of religious and secular (service) grants led to the emergence of a class of landlords who became intermediaries between the state and the peasants.

Grants of land were made to priests and temples, and later to royal officers, along with fiscal and administrative immunities which undermined the authority of the state. The fiscal concessions

accompanying the land grants included the royal right over salt and mines, which were royal monopolies in the Maurya period and evidently signs of sovereignty. Now villages were granted in perpetuity to the beneficiaries, often with administrative rights. In gift villages the inhabitants, cultivators and artisans included, were often asked by their rulers not only to pay the customary taxes to the donees but also to obey their commands; this is proved by many records from central India. The recipients of land grants in north India were empowered to punish thieves and other criminals; in central and western India from the fifth century onwards they were also given the right to try civil cases. The transfer of magisterial and police powers together with fiscal rights to the donees not only weakened the royal authority but also led to the oppression of peasants and inhabitants of the gift villages who were asked to obey their new masters and carry out their orders.

The land grants paved the way for the growth of feudal society. Several inscriptions indicate the emergence of serfdom, which meant that the peasants were attached to their land even when it was given away. Perhaps this began in south India in the earlier period because a third-century Pallava inscription informs us that four sharecroppers remained attached to the plot which was given to brahmanas. According to Fa-hsien, monasteries built for monks were furnished with houses, gardens and fields, and with husbandmen and cattle to cultivate them. This is not corroborated by epigraphic evidence from north India. But in Gujarat, central India and Orissa inscriptions from the sixth century indicate that the peasants were often required to remain on their land even when it was granted to others. In fact the practice of transferring peasants along with land came into wide vogue in the second half of the first millennium AD, which restricted the mobility of independent peasants and reduced them to the position of serfs or semiserfs.

The development of serfdom seems to have coincided with a gradual weakening of the institution of slavery; for the land charters of the Gupta period do not speak of slaves being engaged in economic production. Although the lawgiver Narada mentions fifteen kinds of slaves, they were mostly domestic servants employed in such work as sweeping the gateway, the privy, the road, removing the leavings of food, ordure, wine, and rubbing the master's limbs or shampooing

the secret parts of his body. Those engaged in agricultural activities are described by Narada as doing pure work and are not included in the category of slaves. The institution of slavery tended to become weak, though this did not mean any relief in the sufferings of the peasantry.

The recipients of donations of land and village enjoyed the right of subinfeudation. This eroded the rights of the peasantry. They were often authorized to enjoy the land, to get it enjoyed, to cultivate it or get it cultivated. The donated land could thus be assigned to tenants on certain terms. This implied the donees' right to evict tenants from their land. The practice of subinfeudation therefore reduced permanent tenants to the position of tenants-at-will.

The imposition of forced labour (*vishti*) and several new levies and taxes from the Gupta period onwards further undermined the position of peasants. In the Maurya period slaves and hired labourers were subjected to forced labour; this was supervised by an officer and paid for. But from the Gupta period onwards it was extended to all classes of subjects, and came to include all kinds of work. The *Kamasutra* of Vatsyayana informs us that peasant women were forced to perform unpaid work of various kinds, such as filling the granaries of village headman, moving things in and out of the house, cleaning the house, working in the fields, purchasing of cotton, wood, flax, hemp and thread and the purchase, sale and exchange of various articles. It is known from contemporary inscriptions, especially those of the Vakatakas, that villagers were forced to contribute money and provisions to royal troops and officials when they halted at or passed through the village. They were required to supply flowers and milk to them. Cattle were also furnished for transport. Apart from these contributions, several new taxes came to be collected from the villagers. All this must have increased the burden of taxation on the peasantry. Forced labour, taxes and other dues became all the more oppressive when the donees were given the right to collect them; for, unlike the Maurya royal officers who collected dues from the peasants on behalf of the state, the recipients of land grants now developed hereditary vested interests in the exploitation of the resources of the village. The practice of making land grants thus gave rise to feudal agrarian relations and forms of exploitation which generated much social tension leading to peasant protest of which considerable evidence

is available from the ninth-tenth centuries onwards. But at the same time it led to agrarian expansion in the peripheral and backward areas where donations of land were often made and where brahmana beneficiaries carried their advanced agricultural knowledge—which, towards the end of the first millennium and the beginning of the second, was codified in several texts. The extension of agriculture helped the process of the formation of new states by providing a stable agrarian base from the late Gupta period, when trade ceased to play a major role in socio-political transformation.

The decline of long distance trade seems to have set in from the Gupta period onwards. The inflow of Roman coins stopped after the early Christian centuries and the Roman empire itself broke up a little later. Trade with the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) empire continued until about the middle of the sixth century. Around this time the Byzantines learned from the Chinese the art of growing silk worms. This adversely affected India's commercial contacts with the West. Not surprisingly a guild of silk weavers migrated from their original home in Gujarat to Dashapura (Mandasor in Madhya Pradesh) where they gave up their original profession and took to other occupations. There are indications that the coastal areas of India carried on trade with South-East Asia. But this had little impact on the internal economy of the country.

With the decline in long distance trade linkages between coastal towns and their hinterland became feeble. Commodity production shrank. Trading activity became sluggish and the movement of artisans and traders from one part of the country to the other became redundant. Immobile artisans therefore remained attached to villages and in course of time, like peasants, they were also transferred to the donees. Arts and crafts were thus ruralized, though the fourth century rustless iron pillar at Mehrauli (Delhi) bears testimony to the technological skill of craftsmen, and inscriptions indicate that guilds of artisans and merchants played an important role in the municipal administration of some towns in the Gupta period.

Languishing trade explains the relative paucity of metal money from the Gupta period onwards. The Guptas issued the largest number of gold coins in ancient India, some of them excellent specimens of craftsmanship. But these could be used only in heavy economic transactions like the sale and purchase of land of which evidence is







1 2 3













4 5 6

Plate 15: Coins of Samudragupta: Chandragupta I—Kumaradevi type (1-3), Standard type (4-6).

available from Bengal; these could have hardly flowed into day-to-day retailing. Copper and silver coins of the period are few. Fa-hsien tells us that *cowries* became the common medium of exchange.

The slump in trade and the general decline in crafts and commodity production led to the decay of many towns in the third-fourth century. In north India many urban settlements of the Kushana period like Kaushambi (Allahabad), Hastinapur, Purana Qila (Delhi), Ahichchhatra and Taxila show signs of decay. Ayodhya and Mathura, which were flourishing towns in the early Christian centuries, lost their importance in the Gupta period, though this loss was more than made up much later by their association with Rama and Krishna respectively. Many towns in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Gujarat (Noh, Ujjain, Nagar, etc.) seem to have declined. This is also true of most of the Satavahana urban centres, like Kaundinyapura, Paithan and Nasik (Maharashtra), Amaravati and Dharnikota (Andhra Pradesh), Vadgaon-Madhavpur, Brahmagiri and Chandravalli (Karnataka). In the far south Arikamedu was the most important town which ceased to be economically active after the third century. In the heartland of the Gupta empire evidence of urban decay can be seen at many places. At Vaishali the Gupta structures are less impressive than those of the earlier period. So is the case with Pataliputra (modern Patna); less than two centuries later when the Chinese Buddhist pilgrim Hsuan Tsang came to India, the city had already dwindled to a village. Excavations have shown no habitation at Sohagaura (in Gorakhpur district), where two granaries are said to have existed in the Maurya period. Though an administrative centre of some importance, Varanasi also shows symptoms of decline during the Gupta period.

Obviously urban centres did not disappear altogether in the Gupta period, and prosperous town dwellers living in comfort and ease were not totally absent. The *Kamasutra* describes the life of a well-to-do citizen as one devoted to the pleasures and refinements of life. Gatherings were held where poetic recitations, and music were heard. The young man had to be trained in the art of love. The courtesan was not looked down upon. She was a normal feature of city life. Kalidasa refers to the amorous sports of young gallants with the harlots of Vidisha. According to the *Mudrarakshasa* of Vishakhadatta prostitutes crowded the streets of the capital on festive occasions. The

Dharmashastra writers, no doubt, displayed an unkindly attitude to public women, but, ironically enough, they came to be increasingly associated with the gods in later times. Kalidasa speaks of girls kept at the Mahakala temple at Ujjain. The earliest evidence of temple prostitution is found in a cave inscription at Ramgarh, 256 km south of Banaras, carved perhaps not long after Ashoka.

The status of women continued to decline. In this period certain features emerged which became characteristic of their position in subsequent times. Women were not entitled to formal education, though, like the shudras, they were also allowed to listen to the epics and the Puranas. References to women teachers, philosophers and doctors are available in early Indian literature, but they are few. Lawgivers almost unanimously advocated early marriage; some of them even preferred pre-puberty marriage. Celibacy was to be strictly observed by widows. The practice of *sati* gained the approval of jurists, even if confined to the upper classes. The first memorial of a *sati*, dated AD 510, is found at Eran in Madhya Pradesh. Women were denied any right to property except for *stridhana* in the form of jewellery and garments. They themselves came to be regarded as property to be given or loaned to anybody. Their perpetual tutelage was argued forcefully. The social philosophy demanding increasing subjection of woman to man was a natural development in a patriarchal class-divided society based on developed notions of private property.

The *varna* system seems to have been considerably modified owing to the proliferation of castes. This is evident from a post-Gupta Puranic text which mentions 100 castes as against the 61 noted by Manu in the earlier period. The kshatriya caste swelled with the influx of the Hunas and subsequently the Gurjars, who joined their ranks as Rajputs. The increase in the number of shudra castes and untouchables was largely due to the absorption of forest tribes into settled *varna* society. Often guilds of craftsmen were also transformed into castes. It has been suggested that transfers of land or land revenue gave rise to a new caste, that of the kayasthas (scribes), who undermined the monopoly of brahmanas as scribes. This explains the frequent derogatory references to them in subsequent brahmanical writings. In the countryside in northern India there emerged a class of village elders and headmen called *mahattaras*, who had to be informed of land transfers. Later they also ossified into a caste.

Pronounced *varna* distinctions in various spheres of life can be seen in the writings of the Gupta period. According to Varahmihira a brahmana should have a house with five rooms, a kshatriya four, a vaishya three and a shudra two. He adds that in each case the length and breadth of the main room should vary in order of superiority. The old provision making for different rates of interest for different castes continued in Gupta times. A Puranic text compiled in Gupta times associates the four colours, white, red, yellow and black, with brahmana, kshatriya, vaishya and shudra respectively. This shows the relative status of the four orders. The writings of the period emphasize that a brahmana should not accept food from a shudra because it reduces his spiritual strength. *Varna* distinctions were also observed in legal matters. The lawbooks lay down that a brahmana should be tested by a balance, a kshatriya by fire, a vaishya by water and a shudra by poison. In lawsuits requiring deposit of sureties distinction between the twice-born and the shudras was made. Equally discriminatory were inheritance rules. A shudra son of a person belonging to a higher caste would get the smallest share. According to the lawgiver Brihaspati the son of a twice-born and a shudra woman was not entitled to any share in landed property. He also tells us that witnesses should belong to respectable families. Other legal texts state that shudras could appear as witnesses only for members of their own caste. All this proves the class bias of law and justice.

A distinction was made between shudras and untouchables. A shudra having intercourse with a Chandala woman was to be reduced to her position. The practice of untouchability became more intense than in the earlier period. Penance was provided to remove the sin arising out of touching a Chandala. Fa-hsien informs us that Chandalas entering the gate of a city or market place, would strike a piece of wood to give prior notice of arrival so that men could avoid them. The untouchables in general and the Chandalas in particular are described in contemporary texts in very disparaging terms. They are associated with impurity, untruth, theft, heterodoxy, useless quarrels, passion, wrath and greed.

The *varna* system did not always function smoothly. The *Shanti Parva* of the *Mahabharata*, which may be assigned to the Gupta period, contains at least nine verses which stress the need of combination of brahmanas and kshatriyas; this may indicate some kind of concerted

opposition from the vaishyas and shudras. In one of these passages it is complained that at one stage the vaishyas and shudras wilfully began to unite with the wives of brahmanas. The shudras seem to have been particularly hostile to the existing social order. The *Anushashana Parva* of the *Mahabharata* represents them as destroyers of the king. Another contemporary work describes them as hostile, violent, boastful, short-tempered, untruthful, extremely greedy, ungrateful, heterodox, lazy and impure. All this as well as passages from the legal texts would suggest a conflict between the shudras and the ruling classes. But references to actual revolt by the shudras against the upper classes are not recorded in the sources of the Gupta period.

The ruling classes often used religion for maintaining the social order based on *varna*. Already in the *Gita*, vaishyas, shudras and women were condemned by Krishna as people of low origin. This came to be further emphasized now under the influence of Vaishnavism and Shaivism. A passage of the *Mahabharata* tells us that the shudra can achieve salvation only through service to the twice-born and devotion to god. It is emphasized here and in the Puranas that a shudra can obtain brahmanahood in the next birth through good conduct. This emphasis derived from the theory of *karma*, according to which the character of fortune, social status, happiness or sorrow of a person depended on his action of previous birth. *Karma* (literally 'work' or 'deed') could ripen like a seed planted in the previous season. The doctrine appealed to members of various *varnas*; for even a shudra could hope to be reborn as a king in the next birth if his karmic balance-sheet proved to be favourable. In the *Mrichchhakatika* of Shudraka a bullock-cart driver refuses to kill Vasantasena precisely because he does not want to repeat the sort of crimes which made him a slave in this birth. Evidently such a belief did not permit the masses to blame their miseries on human agency, and laid stress on the necessity of adhering to the duties traditionally prescribed for the *varnas* to which they belonged.

The doctrine of *bhakti*, enunciated first in the *Gita* and a vital force in Vaishnavism and Shaivism, became socially more relevant in the Gupta period. It preached that one could obtain final liberation only through devotion to and faith in god, and not just by performing sacrifices. God was accessible to all through *bhakti*. This new form of

piety was in tune with the social outlook of the times, when the feudatories considered themselves as meditating at the feet of their masters. This explains the new accent on the doctrine of *bhakti* in Vaishnavism, Shaivism, and Mahayana Buddhism.

The messianic aspect of Vaishnavism, and to a lesser extent Shaivism, also became socially more meaningful in the context of the emerging feudal social structure of the time. It consisted in the theory of incarnation, first mentioned in the *Gita* and developed under the influence of the Buddhist doctrine of Bodhisattvas. According to some texts Vishnu goes through as many as thirty-nine *avataras*, though in the most usual classification the number is fixed as ten. They are: Matsya (fish), Kurma (tortoise), Varaha (Boar), Narasimha (man-lion), Vaman (dwarf), Parashurama, Rama, Krishna, Buddha and Kalki. A different list, however, is found in the *Vayu Purana*, a work of the Gupta period. It mentions Narayana, Narasimha, Vamana, Dattatreya, Mandhata, Jamdagnya, Rama, Vedavyasa, Krishna and Kalki; the first three are described as divine incarnations and the rest as human. Vishnu is said to have come in each of the above incarnations as a saviour. He is also supposed to appear at the end of Kali age on horseback to uproot the *mlechchhas* and restore *dharma*. Thus the theory of incarnations (*avataravada*) fostered a hopeful belief in the coming of a redeemer who would deliver his devotees from the miseries of the world. This must have appealed particularly to the lower social orders. The doctrine was also adopted by Shaivism. Twenty-eight *avataras* of Shiva are listed in a contemporary work. But these were more or less imitations of Vishnu incarnations.

In the Gupta period female divinities, mostly of tribal origin and background, attained a position of importance which they had never enjoyed before. Mother goddesses were worshipped at all times in India, but now they emerged from their obscurity and came to be clearly associated with important brahmanical gods. Shri or Shri-Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and plenty, became popular among the vaishyas and shudras, and was recognized as the wife of Vishnu; the earliest epigraph referring to this union belongs to the time of Skandagupta. Parvati became the spouse of Shiva; perhaps the first artistic presentation of her marriage is assigned to the time of Kumaragupta I. Assimilation of a large number of female deities into the brahamanical pantheon leading to the growth of the Shakti cult

(which preached that the male could be activated only through union with a female) and to some sort of a demographic explosion in the world of divinity resulted from interaction between brahmanical and tribal ideas, facilitated by the ever increasing number of brahmana settlements in the backward areas—an interaction which provided a congenial soil for the growth and development of the Tantric religion in the second half of the first millennium.

Of all the brahmanical sects Vaishnavism became the most popular under the patronage of the Gupta rulers. It spread in different parts of the country and even travelled across the seas to South-East Asia. The union of Shri-Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, with Vishnu added to the prestige of the new religion; its spread among the lower orders was facilitated by her earlier popularity with the vaishyas and shudras. The Vishnu cult fulfilled the needs of all sections of society. The kings could pose as incarnations of the god; a Puranic text written probably in the time of Chandragupta II describes a king as endowed with the energy of Vishnu. This led to the exaltation of kingship. The rich could earn religious merit by setting up images and building temples for them. The poor could hope to improve their condition in the next birth while in this birth they could derive solace from the appearance of the god in the form of an *avatara*. The adoption of various deities, beliefs and superstitions by Vaishnavism indicates that it assimilated different popular cults and substituted faith for logic. It therefore acted as an effective instrument for reconciling the masses to their lot and maintaining the social division based on *varna*.

The existence of Shaivism and its various subsects in the Gupta period is amply borne out by the sources. Shiva is extolled as the highest god in some of the Puranas. Like Vaishnavism, Shaivism also received royal support. At least two Shiva temples of the period have survived, one at Nachna Kuttara (Baghelkhand region) and the other at Nagod (Madhya Pradesh). A sculpture from Mathura shows a devotee offering his head to Shiva. Perhaps some extreme subsects of the cult preached such practices as human sacrifice. We are told that Hsuan Tsang, the Chinese Buddhist pilgrim who came to India in the seventh century, was about to be immolated before an image of Durga, the consort of Shiva, when a sudden miraculous storm made his escape possible. The extreme character of Shaivism explains why

it was less popular than Vaishnavism. Whatever success the religion obtained was largely owing to the doctrines it shared with the Vaishnava system.

Buddhism had already split into two major sects, Hinayana and Mahayana, each with a number of subsects. Ceylon, Burma, Cambodia and China had by now developed into centres of Hinayana. Fa-hsien noticed the existence of the Hinayana following in Lob-nor, Darada, Udyana, Gandhara, Bannu, Kanauj and Kashmir. But the Mahayanist branch had also come to stay. Nagarjuna, Aryadeva, Asanga, Vasubandhu and Dignaga, all exponents of the Mahayana sect, flourished in the Gupta period. Through its emphasis on *bhakti* and image worship and its enlarged pantheon which included male and female deities, Mahayanism came closer to the brahmanical religion; under its influence Buddhism seems to have lost much of its original heretical fervour. Fa-hsien met Mahayana monks in Afghanistan, Bhida (Panjab), Mathura and Pataliputra; in Khotan, we are told, all monks were Mahayanists. From the fifth-sixth centuries onwards Mahayanism increasingly came under the influence of Tantric religion, leading in later centuries to the birth of Vajrayana (Thunderbolt Vehicle) Buddhism with its emphasis on various magical rites. With the decline of trade, much of the support that earlier came from the mercantile class ceased in the subsequent period. The later Buddhist monasteries depended for their maintenance on the grants of land and villages by kings, and Nalanda enjoyed the revenue of 200 villages.

Jainism largely remained conservative but by the Gupta period seems to have developed icons. Two Jaina councils were summoned simultaneously at Mathura and Valabhi in AD 313. The Jaina canonical texts were standardized and were later committed to writing at another council held in AD 453 at Valabhi. The extent of Jaina influence perhaps diminished; Mathura and Valabhi seem to have been strongholds of Shvetambar Jainism. Pundravardhana in north Bengal was a centre of the Digambar sect. In certain areas of the Deccan and south India Jainism received support from the local ruling houses, though much of this patronage stopped in the later period. Christianity remained mainly restricted to Malabar. Here a Syrian Church continued to exist and Kalyana near Bombay is said to have received a bishop from Persia. Several prominent Indian citizens belong to this Order even today.

The Gupta period may be said to be a landmark in the development of philosophical ideas. The continuing philosophical debate now veered round the six schools of thought (*shaddarshana*), which became the chief feature of Indian philosophy. The six systems were: *nyaya* (analysis), *vaisheshika* (individual characteristics), *sankhya* (enumeration), *yoga* (application), *mimansa* (inquiry), *vedanta* (end of the Vedas). *Nyaya* was a school of logic and epistemology deriving mainly from the *sutras* or aphorisms of Akshapada Gautama, who may have lived in the early centuries of the Christian era. Pakshilasvamin Vatsyayana, its main expositor, may be referred to the fourth century AD. *Vaisheshika* was complementary to and older than *nyaya*. It was a type of atomic philosophy interested mainly in physics rather than theology. The legendary founder of the system was Uluka Kanada; the greatest of his commentators Prashastapada perhaps lived in the sixth century. *Sankhya* teaches twenty-five basic principles; its central thought is the polarity of *purusha* (soul, person) and *prakriti* (matter). The earliest surviving text of the school is the *Sankhyakarika* of Ishvarakrishna, perhaps of the fourth century. *Yoga* dealt with the control of the body physically, and its basic text goes back to the *Yoga Sutra* of Patanjali of the second century BC. But the redaction of the *sutras* in their present form is attributed to Vyasa who lived seven centuries later. *Mimansa* sought to explain and revive the Vedas. Although the earliest work of the school is said to be the *Sutras* of Jaimini (perhaps sixth century BC), the greatest of early *mimansa* scholars was Shabarasvamin who flourished in the sixth century AD. *Vedanta* (also called *Uttaramimansa*), claiming to have originated from the Vedas, forcefully rejected the theories of the nonbrahmanical schools. Badarayana is said to have formulated its main tenets in the early Christian centuries. But Gaudapada, an important thinker of this school, lived around the middle of the sixth century AD, though the most forceful exposition of its doctrines came from Shankaracharya in the eighth-ninth centuries, when Vedanta became an undying theme of Indian philosophy. Unlike the various theistic sects, however, the abstract philosophical debate centred on the six systems and had no social base in the Gupta period.

Religion was intimately connected with developments in architecture and the plastic arts. The doctrine of *bhakti* and the growing importance of image worship led to the construction of the free

standing temple with a sanctuary (*garbhagriha*), in which the central cult image was placed. Several temples with central shrines have survived from the Gupta period. Mention may be made of the temples at Sanchi, Ladh Khan, Deogarh (near Jhansi), Bhitaragaon, Tigawa and Bhumara. Built either in stone or brick, they were very small and had roofs with spouts to drain off water. The earliest of the surviving Gupta temples is the one standing to the left of the *chaitya*-hall at Sanchi (designated as Temple no. 17). It consists of an enclosed cella with a columned portico in front; this plan formed the nucleus of all the later Indian temples. The most ornate and beautifully composed example of Gupta temple building, however, is the fragmentary temple of Vishnu at Deogarh. It occupies the centre of a square plinth, each of whose four corners had a subsidiary shrine, housing a lesser deity. It may be one of the earliest specimens of the five-shrine (*panchayatana*) variety of temples which became common in subsequent times and reflected the feudal hierarchization of the ever expanding Indian pantheon. But the development of free standing temples did not altogether displace the cave temples. Some of the caves at Ajanta may be assigned to the period of the Guptas, though perhaps the highest achievement of the early Indian cave architecture, the Kailashanatha temple at Ellora, belongs to the eighth century.



Plate 16: Gupta temple, Sanchi.

Gupta sculpture marks the culmination of earlier developments in plastic arts. The unusual, larger-than-life size horse sculpture from Khairigarh in Uttar Pradesh, often believed to represent a sacrificial horse used by Samudragupta for one of his *ashwamedha* rituals, has a perceptible affinity with the Kushana plastic tradition. The brahmanical gods sculpted during the period were mainly incarnations of Vishnu and the lesser Vaishnavite deities. The Shiva cult, still basically concerned with phallic worship, perhaps limited the scope of sculptural imagination, though several images of Shaivite deities (Durga, Skanda, etc.) have been found. A substantial number of these sculptures come from important centres like Vidisha, Eran and Udayagiri in Madhya Pradesh. Of these Udayagiri occupies a place of importance. Twenty rock-cut chambers were excavated here during the Gupta period and quite a few of the images found here, unlike most of the specimens of Gupta art, can be positively assigned to certain Gupta kings. The crowning achievement of Gupta sculpture is the numerous seated and standing images of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas at Sarnath, where, under the influence of the Mathura tradition, a distinct school of art flourished. A good specimen of Sarnath sculpture is the image of the Buddha seating in *dharmachakrapravarttana* attitude. This is a fine expression in stone of the meditative and compassionate Buddha giving his first sermon. The impact of the Sarnath idiom was also felt in eastern and western India and in the Deccan. Its influence, however, decreased as it travelled south where local tendencies dominated.

Painting was a developed art. Literary references prove that apart from professional artists, men and women of the upper classes could ably handle a brush. Remains of Gupta paintings may be seen in the caves at Bagh (cave IV, *c.* AD 500), Ajanta (caves XVI, XVII, XIX and I, II) and Badami (cave III) besides faint traces at several other places. The Ajanta murals supplied the norm for all contemporary painting. The Ajanta artists displayed consummate skill in delineating human and animal figures. The representation of the Bodhisattva announcing his renunciation (cave I) and that of Indra and his entourage flying to greet the Buddha in Tushita heaven (cave XVII) are only a few of the masterpieces. Decorations on ceilings, pedestals of columns and door- and window-frames speak of the artists' extraordinary powers of conception and technique. Although the themes at Ajanta are religious, one can see in the painting a dramatic panorama of the life of princes, nobles, warriors and sages. The general impression we gain is



Plate 17: Facade of Ajanta cave XXVI.

one of affluence of the upper classes; the normal hardships of the village folk are not portrayed.

In literature, as in art and architecture, the Gupta period witnessed an efflorescence. Sanskrit language and literature, after centuries of evolution and through lavish royal patronage, reached what has been described as a level of classical excellence. Among the known Sanskrit poets of the period, the greatest name is that of Kalidasa, who lived in the court of Chandragupta II. The *Meghaduta*, his lyrical poem of little over a hundred graceful stanzas, contains the message from the love-lorn Yaksha to his wife pining across the northern mountains in Alaka. The *Raghuvamsha* speaks of the all-round victories of Rama, and may indirectly refer to some Gupta conquests. The *Kumarasambhava* deals with the courtship of Shiva and Parvati and the birth of their



Plate 18: Details of an *apsara*. Fresco, Ajanta cave.

son Skanda. The *Ritusamhara* describes the six seasons in relation to *shringara*. The poems of Kalidasa remain unequalled in their metrical and verbal perfection. His most famous work, the play *Abhijnana-shakuntalam*, has for its theme the union of king Dushyanta with Shakuntala; it remains the supreme achievement of early Indian literature and stagecraft.

Several other dramatists are said to have flourished during the supremacy of the Guptas. Shudraka, often supposed to be of royal lineage, wrote the *Mrichchhakatika*. Its plot centres round the love of the poor brahmana Charudatta for the wealthy, beautiful, accomplished and cultured courtesan Vasantasena. Vishakhadatta is the author of the *Mudrarakshasa*, which deals with schemes of the shrewd Chanakya. The *Devichandraguptam*, another drama written by him, has survived only in fragments.

The best poets and playwrights often found their richest pasture in the passionate physical love of men for women; literary descriptions of feminine beauty often tally with the voluptuous female figures represented in Ajanta murals. Erotica, in fact, became prominent in the literary milieu from the Gupta period onwards and the *Kamasutra* of Vatsyayana, the first systematic enunciation of the art of love, remained a model for later writers on the subject. So strong became the erotic tradition in literature during post-Gupta times that even while writing on renunciation (*vairagya*) Bhartrihari displays lustful longing for the ripe breasts, thighs and devastating glances of a beautiful woman. All this was in keeping with feudal and courtly tastes. The life of the royal court, therefore, is amply reflected in Sanskrit plays and poems, the only possible exception was the *Mrichchhakatika*. Sanskrit literature, like art, was mainly enjoyed by the court, upper classes and the aristocracy. The uneducated masses could hardly have understood, much less appreciated, the ornate court literature. Not surprisingly therefore the leading male characters of high social status in the contemporary plays speak polished Sanskrit, and those of low status, women and the brahmana buffoon (*vidushaka*) speak Prakrit.

The Gupta period also saw an increase in the production of religious literature. This is clear from the fact that some of the most important of the eighteen Puranas (the *Markandeya, Brahmanda, Vishnu, Bhagavata* and *Matsya*) were finally redacted during this period. The Puranas were originally composed by bards; in almost all of them the

Suta Lomaharshana or his son Ugrashrava appears as the narrator. But by now they fell into the hands of the brahmana compilers who often wrote new gods into them and made substantial interpolations. The *Mahabharata*, traditionally attributed to Vyasa, was also redacted; it was inflated from the original 24000 verses to 100,000 verses. There is much in common between this epic and the lawbooks. Some of the injunctions of Manu, for instance, occur in identical form in the *Shantiparva* of the *Mahabharata* which, contrary to the generally held view, may imply that this legal text belongs to the Gupta period. Several other lawbooks like those of Vishnu, Yajnavalkya, Narada, Brihaspati and Katyayana may also have been composed during Gupta times. The brahmanical world view found in the epic, the Puranas and the Dharmashastra texts is reflected in the various versions of the *Panchatantra* fables which were elaborated in prose interspersed with gnomic verses.

Some important astronomical works were written. Aryabhata, the author of the *Aryabhatiyam*, flourished in the fifth century. Contrary to the existing notions, he suggested that the earth revolves around the sun and rotates on its axis; but this did not affect later Indian astronomical practice. Through his efforts astronomy branched off as a separate discipline from mathematics. He was the first to use the decimal place-value system; but its invention is not attributed to him. Varahmihira, who lived towards the end of the sixth century, wrote several treatises on astronomy and horoscopy. His *Panchasiddhantika* deals with five astronomical systems (*siddhanta*); two of these assume a close knowledge of Greek astronomy. The *Laghu* and *Brihaj-jataka*, both written by him, are works on horoscopy which became popular from the Gupta period onwards. The Sanskrit language was also enriched by the development of grammar and lexicography. The *Amarakosha* (also called the *Namalinganushasana*) compiled by Amarasimha, has remained an indispensable lexicon till our own times.

The ornate and verbose Sanskrit continued to be the language of the ruling class throughout the country. But from the sixth-seventh centuries onwards regional languages began to develop as a result of the interaction between the various forms of Sanskrit and the non-Sanskritic and tribal dialects prevalent in the areas where brahmanas settled to enjoy the benefits of the land granted to them. The post-

Gupta centuries thus saw the growth of proto-Hindi, proto-Bengali, proto-Assamese, proto-Rajasthani, proto-Gujarati and proto-Marathi. This was accompanied by the emergence of regional scripts. All this was in keeping with the gradual formation of regional cultural units (like Andhra, Assam, Bengal, Gujarat, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Orissa, Rajasthan or Tamilnadu).

The period of the imperial Guptas is described in most standard books on Indian history as one of Hindu renaissance. This is far from true. The highest achievements of Gupta sculpture are the Buddhist images from Sarnath; the best contemporary paintings from Ajanta have Buddhist themes. Progress in astronomical knowledge as represented in the writings of Aryabhata and Varahamihira owed only in part to indigenous tradition. One of the five astronomical systems dealt with by Varahamihira was the *Romakasiddhanta*, which evidently referred to the Roman system; another, the *Paulishasiddhanta*, is explained as a recollection of the name of the classical astronomer Paul of Alexandria. The main component of the so-called Hindu renaissance therefore is the writings of Kalidasa, the composition of some of the Puranas, and the coins and inscriptions which indicate that the Gupta kings patronized the two brahmanical sects, Vaishnavism and Shaivism. But the work of Kalidasa is not indicative of an intellectual rebirth or revival of literary activity; it merely implies a development of the literary forms and styles which were evolving in an earlier period. The Puranas had existed much before the time of the Guptas in the form of bardic literature; in the Gupta age some of them were finally compiled and given their present form. Nor does the growing popularity of Vaishnavism and Shaivism mean any religious resurgence. The basic tenets of the two religions go back to earlier times; now in the context of emerging feudal conditions they could attract a greater following. The use of the term 'Hindu' is equally erroneous. It was first used by Arabs in the post-Gupta period to describe the inhabitants of Hindu (India). Ancient Indians never thought of themselves as Hindus. The much publicized Hindu renaissance was, in reality, not a renaissance, much less a Hindu one.

The Gupta rulers, with the exception of the 'ignoble' Ramagupta, are also credited with a revival of nationalism, presumably because they fought against the Shakas and Hunas. No extant court drama or Sanskrit poetical work directly refers to any Gupta ruler. The only

contemporary reference to them is found in the Puranas, which contemptuously group them with petty kings described as 'barbarous (*mlechchhapraya*), impious, dishonest (or liars), niggardly and highly irascible' Praise is showered on the Guptas only in their own inscriptions, Samudragupta's eulogy being the longest. Soon after their fall they joined the legion of the forgotten, and their memory was not revived until the nineteenth century when their records were deciphered. The documents were seized upon by nationalist Indian scholars, who used them justifiably as counter-argument to the persistent British imperialist propaganda that India had no history except for a series of conquests by a succession of invaders. It has been rightly remarked that 'far from the Guptas reviving nationalism, it was nationalism that revived the Guptas'

Some Indian historians have been so enamoured of the Guptas as to tirelessly speak of their rule as representing a golden age in Indian history. In an emotionally surcharged multi-volume work we are told in a vein of romantic lamentation: 'life was never happier' Yet it was during that time that in certain parts of the country serfdom appeared, leading eventually to the economic bondage of the peasantry. Women became an item of property and came to live in the perpetual tutelage of men, notwithstanding their idealization in art and literature. Caste distinctions and caste rigidity became sharper than ever before; law and justice showed a definite bias in favour of the higher castes. Fa-hsien, the Chinese Buddhist pilgrim-scholar who came to India during the reign of Chandragupta II, tells us that the people were generally happy. True, the upper classes were happy and prosperous, and lived in comfort and ease, as can be judged from contemporary art and literature, but this could hardly have been true of the lower orders. The Chinese pilgrim himself speaks of the plight of the Chandalas. The untouchable class as a whole came to be degraded further in the social scale. Social tensions continued. But religion was used as an instrument for maintaining the *varna*-divided society. For the upper classes all periods in history have been golden; for the masses none. The truly golden age of the people does not lie in the past, but in the future.

Bibliography

General

Several scholars have written general surveys of ancient Indian history before and after Independence. Among the pre-Independence works the most well-known is V.A. Smith, *Early History of India* (4th edn, revd by M. Edwardes, Oxford, 1924) which suffers from a pronounced imperialist bias and is no longer popular. After Independence many scholars have attempted to present overviews of major historical developments in early India. Among the works providing an insightful all round survey of developments based on a critical appraisal of original sources with accent on social and economic history, D.D. Kosambi's writings remain unsurpassed. His *Introduction to the Study of Indian History* (Bombay, 1957) and *Culture and Civilisation of Ancient India in Historical Outline* (London, 1965) present a radical perception of India's past and his methodology and approach based on a combination of literary, archaeological and ethnographical material have given a new direction to modern writings on early India. There is much in common between him and R.S. Sharma whose scientific analysis of social, economic and political developments has significantly influenced recent historiography of ancient India. References to his specialized works will be made at appropriate places but suffice it to mention here that his *Ancient India* (Delhi, 1977) has gone a long way in demystifying India's early history. Romila Thapar presents a lucid account of historical developments in her *History of India*, vol I (Harmondsworth, 1966) which, however, covers a much larger time segment than the ancient phase of Indian history. K.A. Antanova *et al*, *A History of India*, 2 vols (Moscow, 1979), and Hermann Kulke and D. Rothermund, *A History of India* (Delhi, 1986) deal with all periods of Indian history and their treatment of the ancient period is sketchy. Hemchandra Raychaudhuri, *Political History of Ancient India* (1st edn, Calcutta, 1927; 7th edn, Calcutta, 1970; revd edn with commentary by B.N. Mukherjee, New Delhi, 1996) remains the most authoritative

account of the political/dynastic history up to the Gupta period. K.A. Nilakanta Sastri's *A History of South India* (Oxford, 1955, 2nd edn, 1958) is an equally important work dealing with the political history of the peninsular India, though it also contains sections on cultural developments. The first three volumes of R.C. Majumdar *et al*, eds, *The History and Culture of the Indian People* (Bombay, 1951ff) are as informative as they are revivalist and Hindu chauvinist in approach.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

S.N. Mukherjee, *Sir William Jones: A study in Eighteenth-Century British Attitudes to India*, London, 1968, and O.P. Kejariwal, *The Asiatic Society of Bengal and the Discovery of India's Past*, New Delhi, 1988, analyse early historical writings on ancient India. A similar exercise has been undertaken recently by Kate Teltscher, *India Inscribed: European and British Writing on India 1600-1800*, Delhi, 1995.

For a discussion of the imperialist and nationalist attitudes to Indian past see R.S. Sharma, *Aspects of Ancient Indian Political Ideas and Institutions*, Delhi, 1959, Chap. 1; idem, 'Historiography of the Ancient Indian Social Order', in C.H. Philips, ed, *Historians of India, Pakistan and Ceylon*, London, 1961. This volume also contains articles by C.H. Philips and A.L. Basham who have evaluated the works of James Mill, Mountstuart Elphinstone and Vincent A. Smith. Romila Thapar, *The Past and Prejudice*, New Delhi, 1975, identifies major trends in the historical writings on ancient India. S.P. Sen, ed, *Historians and Historiography in Modern India*, Calcutta, 1973, contains articles on several Indian historians who wrote during the colonial period. D.D. Kosambi's historical writings were first evaluated by D.N. Jha ('A Marxist View of Ancient Indian History', in Mohit Sen, ed, *Das Kapital Centenary Volume*, Delhi, 1967, and 'D.D. Kosambi', in S.P. Sen, op. cit.). For subsequent assessments see: Dale Riepe ('D.D. Kosambi: Father of Indian Scientific History', in R.S. Sharma, ed, *Indian Society: Historical Probings*, Delhi, 1974); Romila Thapar, *Interpreting Early India*, Delhi, 1992. For a discussion of Marxist influence on the historiography of early India see Brendan O'Leary, *The Asiatic Mode of Production: Oriental Despotism, Historical Materialism and Indian History*, Basil Blackwell, 1989. Kate Curie (*Beyond Orientalism: An Exploration of Some Recent Themes in Indian History and Society*, Calcutta, 1996) has also discussed some of the issues raised by O'Leary and her reference point is Edward Said's *Orientalism*, London, 1978, and *Culture and Imperialism*, London, 1993.

Chapter 2: From Prehistory to the Harappan Civilization

The urban features of the Harappan civilization has been the focus of scholarly writings since its discovery in the 1920s as is evident from the works of E.J.H. Mackay ('Excavations at Mohenjodaro', *Annual Report of the Archaeological Survey of India*, 1928-9; *Further Excavations at Mohenjodaro*, Govt. of India, 1938; *Chanhu-Daro Excavations*, 1935-6, New Haven, 1943), John Marshall (*Mohenjodaro and the Indus Civilization*, London, 1931) and M.S. Vats (*Excavations at Harappa*, Govt. of India Press, 1940). Even subsequently when Indian archaeology made good progress largely due to the efforts of Mortimer Wheeler, the emphasis on Harappan urbanism continued as is evident from his own works (*The Indus Civilisation*, Cambridge, 1953; *Early India and Pakistan*, London, 1958; *Civilisations of the Indus Valley and Beyond*, London, 1966) which remain

popular readings, though Stuart Piggot (*Prehistoric India to 1000* BC, London, 1950) and D.H. Gordon (*Prehistoric Background of Indian Culture,* Bombay, 1958) take into account much non-Harappan material. In recent years studies of both urban and rural settlements in India and Pakistan have enabled scholars to present a balanced view of Harappan and other chalcolithic cultures of the subcontinent. During the last twenty-five years or so many important studies dealing with Indian prehistory and protohistory have appeared and have considerably modified our earlier understanding. D.P. Agrawal has sought to integrate data from Harappan and non-Harappan chalcolithic sites taking into account the ecological and technological factors in his *Copper Bronze Age in India,* Delhi, 1971 and has provided an overview of the archaeological material from a large number of pre-Harappan and Harappan sites in *The Archaeology of India,* London, 1982. H.D. Sankalia, *The Prehistory and Protohistory of India and Pakistan* (2nd edn, Poona, 1974) may be used as a compendium of information available from different prehistoric and protohistoric sites of the country. The writings of G.L. Possehl (*Ancient Cities of the Indus,* Delhi, 1979 and the *Harappan Civilization,* Delhi, 1982 edited by him) are useful for a broader understanding of the Harappan culture and those of Shereen Ratnagar (*Encounters: The Westerly Trade of the Harappan Civilization,* Delhi, 1981; *Enquiries into the Political Organization of the Harappan Society,* Pune, 1991) throw light on Harappan trade and political organization. F. R. and B. Allchin, *Origins of a Civilization: The Prehistory and Early Archaeology of South Asia,* New Delhi, 1997, makes a refreshing reading without providing any new insights and J.M. Kenoyer, 'The Indus Valley Tradition of Pakistan and Western India', *Journal of World Prehistory,* V, no. 4 (1991), presents a summary of major developments in Harappan archaeology and discusses the environmental setting and major aspects of the Harappan civilization.

Chapter 3: The Aryans and the Vedic Life

Evidence on the history of Aryans in India is available in the various categories of the Vedic literature. The most relevant Vedic texts are: *The Hymns of the Rig-Veda,* trans. R.T.H. Griffiths (Varanasi, 1896-7), *Aitareya Brahamana,* trans. A.B. Keith (Harvard Oriental Series, xxv, Cambridge, Mass. 1920), *Shatapatha Brahmana,* trans. J. Eggeling (Oxford, 1882-1900), *Taittiriya Brahmana,* ed. R.L. Mitra (Calcutta, 1855-70), *Thirteen Principal Upanishads,* trans. F. Max Muller (Oxford, 1921), *The Grihyasutras,*

trans. H. Oldenberg (Indian rpt, Delhi, 1967), and the *Dharmasutras,* trans. G. Buhler, *Sacred Books of the East,* ii and xiv (Indian rpt, Delhi, 1965). J. Gonda (*The Vedic Literature,* Otto Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden, 1975), gives a good idea of the contents of the corpus ofVedic literature; and Vibha Tripathi (*The Painted Grey Ware: An Iron Age Culture of Northern India,* Delhi, 1975) provides a competent analysis of the archaeological evidence bearing on the later Vedic period.

The archaeological material bearing the Indo-Aryan homeland and the spread of the Aryan tribes was discussed by V. Gordon Childe in *The Aryans: A Study of Indo-European Origins* (London, 1926) and *New Light on the Most Ancient East* (London, 1952). In recent years, however, much literature has grown on the Aryan problem. Some of the important relevant writings are: G.M. Bongard-Levin, *The Origin of Aryans: From Scythis to India,* New Delhi, 1980; Colin Renfrew, *Archaelogy and Language: The Puzzle of Indo-European Origins,* London, 1987; J. Harmatta, 'Proto-Iranians and Proto-Indians in Central Asia in the 2nd millennium BC', in B.A. Litvinsky, M.S. Asimov, *et al,* eds, *Ethnic Problems in the History of Central Asia in the Early Period,* Moscow, 1981; idem, 'The Emergence of the Indo-Iranians: The Indo-Iranian Languages', in A.H. Dani and V. M. Masson, eds, *History of Civilizations of Central Asia,* UNESCO, 1992; J.P. Mallory, *In Search of the Indo-Europeans: Languange, Archaeology and Myth,* London, 1989. G. Erdosy, ed, *The Indo-Aryans of Ancient South Asia: Language, Material Culture and Ethnicity* (Berlin, 1995; 1st Indian edn, Delhi, 1997) brings together papers making a case for interdisciplinary approach to the Aryan problem, though a few of them seem to throw red herrings across the path of historical analysis. For convincing arguments in favour of the coming of the Aryans from outside India see: R.S. Sharma, *Looking for the Aryans,* Madras, 1995. For a discussion of the development of the idea of Aryan race see: L. Poliakov, *The Aryan Myth: A history of racist and nationalist ideas in Europe,* trans. Edmund Howard, London, 1974. The use of the concept of Aryan race in the Indian context has been dealt with by Joan Leopold ('The Aryan Theory of Race', *Indian Economic and Social History Review,* vii, 1970; idem, 'British Applications of the Aryan Theory of Race to India', *The English Historical Review,* lxxxix, 1974), Thomas R. Trautmann (*Aryans and British India,* New Delhi, 1997) and Romila Thapar 'The Theory of Aryan Race and India: History and Politics', *Transactions of the International Conference of Eastern Studies,* Tokyo, xl, 1995). Peter Robb, ed. *The Concept of Race in South Asia,* New Delhi, 1995, is an anthology of articles which

provide a useful background to the debate centring round the Aryan race theory.

Aspects of the Aryan life are described in the relevant sections of the *Cambridge History of India*, I (1922). But a more recent and percipient analysis of material life, social differentiation and emergence of state on the basis of the Vedic texts, archaeological evidence and field work is available in R.S. Sharma, *Material Culture and Social Formation in Ancient India*, Delhi, 1985; idem, *The State and Varna Formation in the Mid-Ganga Plains: An Ethnoarchaeological View,* Delhi, 1996; idem, *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India,* 3rd revd edn, Delhi, 1991; idem, *Origin of the State in India*, University of Bombay, 1989. Romila Thapar (*From Lineage to State: Social Formations in the Mid-first Millennium* BC, Delhi, 1984) studies the origins of state from an anthropological point of view. For a different point of view see J.C. Heesterman, *The Ancient Indian Royal Consecration Ceremony,* The Hague, 1957, and Jan Gonda, *Ancient Indian Kingship from Religious points of View,* Leiden, 1969. D.D. Kosambi's articles ('Brahmin Clans', *Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, New Series, xxiii; 'On the Origin of the Brahmin Gotras', ibid. xxvi) are essential readings for a rational understanding of the emergence of the brahmana groups in the Vedic period and R.S. Sharma discusses the origin of shudras in *Shudras in Ancient India*, 2nd revd edn, Delhi, 1980. His *Perspectives in Social and Economic History of Early India,* 2nd revd edn, Delhi, 1995, is an insightful study of some of the social institutions from the Vedic period onwards. S.D. Singh, *Polyandry in Ancient India*, Delhi, 1978, investigates the meaning of marriage, the importance of incest taboos and presents a theoretical analysis of polyandry. On Vedic religion see: A.A. Macdonell, *Vedic Mythology*, Strassbourg, 1897; A.B. Keith, *Religion and Philosophy of the Vedas and Upanishads*, Cambridge, Mass, 1925; P.S. Deshmukh, *The Origin and Development of Religion in Vedic Literature*, Oxford, 1933; Louis Renou, *Vedic India*, Calcutta, 1957; Jan Gonda, *The Ritual Sutras: A History of Indian Literature,* Otto Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden, 1977. D.D. Kosambi, 'Urvasi and Puruvas' in *Myth and Reality,* Bombay, 1962, is an excellent example of a rational analysis of Vedic myths. For a recent attempt to relate the composition ofVedic texts with changing socio-political context see: Michael Witzel, 'The Development of the Vedic Canon and its Schools: The Social and Political Milieu', in Michael Witzel, ed, *Inside the Texts Beyond the Texts: New Approaches to the Study of the Vedas,* Cambridge, 1997.

Chapters 4 and 5: The Material Background of Religious Dissent: Jainism and Buddhism, and *The First Territorial States*

The Buddhist, Jain and Brahmanical texts form the main bulk of original sources relating to the events and developments discussed in Chapters 4 and 5. Evidence is also available from the Greek accounts. In addition, reports of archaeological excavations at many sites furnish significant information bearing on the historical processes and developments during the period *c* 600-300 BC.

The important relevant Buddhist texts are: *Anguttara Nikaya*, trans. F. L. Woodward (vols 1, 2 and 5) and E.M. Hare (vols 3 and 4), Pali Text Society, London, 1932; *Digha Nikaya*, trans. T.W. Rhys Davids and J.E. Carpenter, 3 vols, London, 1890-1911; *Majjhima Nikaya*, trans. Lord Chalmers, 2 vols, *Sacred Books of the Buddhists*, London, 1926-7; *Vinaya Pitaka*, trans. I.B. Horner, 5 pts, *Sacred Books of the Buddhists*, London, 1938-52; Jataka, trans. various hands, 6 vols, London, 1895-1907 Among the brahmanical sources mention may be made of the *Vishnu Purana* (trans. H.H. Wilson, London, 1864 and the *Bhagavat Purana* (trans. E. Bournouf, Paris, 1840-98). Though compiled much later these Puranas contain considerable information bearing on this period. Also Panini's *Ashtadhyayi*, the first work on Sanskrit grammar (fifth century BC), is a useful primary source especially when studied in conjunction with other types of evidence. In the category of brahmanical texts the *Grihyasutras* (trans. H. Oldenberg, Indian rpt, Delhi, 1967) and the *Dharmasutras* (trans. G. Buhler, *Sacred Books of the East*, ii and xiv, Indian rpt, Delhi, 1965) yield much data on social developments taking place in the age of the Buddha as well as in the earlier period. Relevant Jaina sources are available in the *Jaina Sutras* (trans. J. Jacobi, Oxford, 1884-5). Greek accounts of India have been translated by J.W. McCrindle in: *Ancient India as Described by Ktesias the Knidian* (Calcutta, 1882), *Ancient India as Described in Classical Literature* (Westminster, 1896). Herodotus' *History* (Oxford, 1913-14) refers to north-western India. Substantial amount of data may be obtained from a large number of archaeological publications, and excavation reports of which only a few are listed here: J. Marshall, *Taxila* (Cambridge, 1951); A. Ghosh, *Rajagriha* (5th edn, Delhi, 1958); G.R. Sharma, *Kaushambi* (Allahabad, 1960); A.S. Altekar and Vijayakanta Mishra, *Report on Kumrhar Excavations 1951-55* (Patna, 1959); Suraj Bhan, *Excavations at Sugh (1964-65) Haryana,* reprinted from *Journal of Haryana Studies, Kurukshetra University*, ix, nos.1-2 (1977), R.C. Gaur, *Excavations at Atranjikhera* (Delhi, 1983); A.K. Narain *et al,*

Excavations at Rajghat, pts I-IV (Varanasi, 1976-8), B.P. Sinha and L.A. Narain, *Pataliputra Excavations 1955-56* (Patna, 1970); B.P. Sinha and Sita Ram Ray, *Excavations at Vaishali 1958-62* (Patna, 1968); B.P. Sinha and B.S. Varma, *Sonpur Excavations 1956 and 1959-62* (Patna, 1977); K.K. Sinha, *Excavations at Shravasti, 1959* (Varanasi, 1967); B.B. Lal, 'Excavations at Hastinapur...', *Ancient India*, nos. 10-11 (1954-5).

For political history of the first territorial states (*mahajanapadas*) see H.C. Raychaudhuri, *Political History of Ancient India* (Delhi, 1996); Yogendra Mishra, *An Early History of Vaishali* (Delhi, 1962); idem, *History of Videha* (Patna, 1981). For Alexander's campaign Vincent Smith, *Early History of India* (Oxford, 1904) continues to be adequate. B.C. Law (*Some Kshatriya Tribes in Ancient India,* Calcutta, 1924), K.P. Jayaswal, (*Hindu Polity,* Calcutta, 1924) and J.P. Sharma (*Republics in Ancient India,* Leiden, 1968) emphasize the democratic character of the tribal states in the age of the Buddha. R.S. Sharma (*Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India*, 3rd edn, Delhi, 1991) provides a corrective to their nationalist and revivalist approach and throws light on the emergence of taxation system which was a major prop to the early state in India. His *Material Culture and Social Formations in Ancient India* (Delhi, 1983) is a seminal work devoted, among other things, to the study of social change with special reference to the role of iron technology, dispersal of settled agriculture, growth of urban centres and trade, and their bearing on the rise and growth of Jainism and Buddhism. For the growth of urban centres also see: A. Ghosh, *The City in Early Historical India*, Simla, 1973; G. Erdody, *Urbanisation in Early Historic India*, Oxford, 1988 and F.R. Allchin, *The Archaeology of Early Historic South Asia: The Emergence of Cities and States*, Cambridge, 1995. Much has been written on punch-marked coinage. Michael Mitchiner (*The Origins of Indian Coinage,* London, 1973) has studied the evolution of the punch-marked coinage whereas D.D. Kosambi's writings dealing with it (*Indian Numismatics*, Delhi, 1981) present its first scientific analysis, though its methological importance has not yet been fully recognized. Data on society in the age of the Buddha is available in Richard Fick, *The Social Organisation of North-East India in Buddha's Time* (Calcutta, 1920), N.K. Wagle, *Society at the Time of the Buddha* (Bombay, 1966) and in the relevant sections of R.S. Sharma, *Shudras in Ancient India,* Delhi, 1980. V.S. Agrawala, *India as Known to Panini*, Lucknow, 1953, throws light on different aspects of social and material life. For information on the growth of mixed castes and the origin of untouchability see V. Jha, 'Varnasamkara in the Dharmasutras:

Theory and Practice', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, xiii (1970); idem, 'Stages in the History of Untouchables', *Indian Historical Review,* no. 1 (1975). Devaraj Chanana, *Slavery in Ancient* India, Delhi, 1960, analyses the institution of slavery on the basis of the Buddhist and other sources and Uma Chakrabarti (*The Social Dimensions of Early Buddhism*, Delhi, 1987) elaborates some of the points first made by D.D. Kosambi (*Introduction to the Study of Indian History*, Bombay, 1956) and R.S. Sharma ('Material Background of the Origin of Buddhism' in Mohit Sen, ed, *Das Kapital Centenary Volume,* Delhi, 1967). Although there is a good amount of literature on heterodox religions, especially Buddhism and Jainism, the following works may be used with profit: Dharmanand Kosambi, *Bhagvan Buddha*, trans. from Marathi to Hindi, Shripad Joshi, Delhi, 1956; W. Rahul, *What the Buddha Taught*, New York, 1962; Edward Conze, *Buddhism: Its Essence and Development,* Oxford, 1951; A.K. Warder, *Indian Buddhism*, Delhi, 1970; A.L. Basham, *History and Doctrine of the Ajivikas*, London, 1951; S. Stevenson, *The Heart of Jainism* (Oxford, 1915) and N.N. Bhattacharyya, *Jain Philosophy: Historical Outline*, Delhi, 1976. I.B. Horner (*Women under Primitive Buddhism*, London, 1930) gives an idea of the Buddhist attitude to women and P.S. Jaini (*Gender and Salvation*, Delhi, 1991) studies later Jaina sectarian debates centring round the women's capacity to achieve spiritual liberation.

Chapter 6: The First Empire

The relevant Puranic sources are found in F.E. Pargiter, *Dynasties of the Kali Age* (London, 1913). The *Arthashastra* of Kautilya has been translated by R. Shamasastri (Mysore, 1958), though a vastly improved study of the text is R.P. Kangle, *The Kautiliya Arthshastra*, 3 pts, Bombay, 1965. For a renewed scholarly interest in the dating of the work see: Thomas R. Trautmann, *Kautilya and the Arthashastra*, Leiden, 1971; S.C. Mishra, *Evolution of Kautilya's Arthashastra: An Inscriptional Approach*, Delhi, 1997 The *Mudrarakshasa* of Vishakhadatta, ed, K.H. Dhruva (Poona, 1923) is a later work but throws light on the history of the Mauryas. Buddhist evidence on the Maurya period comes from the *Dipavamsa*, ed, Oldenberg (London, 1879), *Mahavamsa*, ed, W. Geiger (London, 1908) and the *Divyavadana*, ed, Cowell and Neil (Cambridge, 1886). The translation of the *Indica* of Megasthenes is available in J.W. McCrindle, *Ancient India as Described by Megathenes and Arrian,* Calcutta, 1877. Also see K. Karttunen, *India in Early Greek Literature,* Helsinki, 1989. For archaeological material

found in the Maurya levels at various sites the excavation reports listed under Chapters 4 and 5, volumes of *Ancient India* and *Indian Archaeology—A Review* (both published by the Archaeological Survey of India) and the various learned journals may be consulted. Details on the archaeology of the Maurya sites may also be obtained from relevant entries in A. Ghosh, ed, *An Encyclopaedia of Indian Archaeology*, Delhi, 1989. For Ashokan inscriptions Edward Hultzsch, *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, i (London, 1925) remains indispensable. For inscriptions discovered in recent years the following books, apart from the articles published in various journals, may be useful: D.C. Sircar, *Asokan Studies*, Calcutta, 1979; B.N. Mukherjee, *Studies in Aramaic Edicts of Ashoka*, Calcutta, 1984.

H.C. Raychaudhuri, *Political History of Ancient India*, discusses the basic points of the history of the Mauryas. But several monographs have been written on them, especially Ashoka. Mention may be made of: Vincent A. Smith, *Ashoka* (Oxford, 1903); D.R. Bhandarkar, *Ashoka* (Calcutta, 1925); B.M. Barua, *Ashoka and His Inscriptions* (Calcutta, 1948) and B.G. Gokhale, *Buddhism and Ashoka* (Bombay, 1949). Romila Thapar, *Ashoka and the Decline of the Mauryas* (1st pub. Oxford, 1961) throws fresh light on the Maurya chronology and on the social and economic life. Its revised edition (Delhi, 1997) has a useful bibliography on the Maurya period. For her recent views on the Maurya state see Romila Thapar, *Mauryas Revisited* (Calcutta, 1988); idem, 'The State as Empire', in H. Claessen and P. Skalnik, ed, *The Study of the State*, The Hague, 1981. Cf. G. Fussman, 'Central and Provincial Administration in Ancient India: the Problem of the Mauryan Empire', *Indian Historical Review*, xiv (1987-8). K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, ed, *The Age of the Nandas and Mauryas* (Varanasi, 1952) and idem, ed, *Comprehensive History of India*, ii (Bombay, 1957) are standard works on the Maurya period. G.M. Bongard-Levin, *Studies in Ancient India and Central Asia* (Calcutta, 1971) briefly discusses the *Indica* of Megasthenes and Ashokan epigraphs, but his *Mauryan India* (New Delhi, 1985) is a more comprehensive work. Relevant sections of the works of R.S. Sharma (*Shudras in Ancient India*, 2nd revd edn, Delhi, 1980; *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India*, 3rd edn, Delhi, 1991; *Perspectives in Social and Economic History of Early India*, 2nd revd edn, Delhi, 1995) furnish substantial information on society, economy and state in the Maurya period. For a treatment of evidence pertaining to the land and land revenue system see: U.N. Ghoshal, *Contributions to the History of Hindu Revenue System* (1st edn, Calcutta, 1929, 2nd edn with a Glossary of Fiscal terms and Technical Expressions compiled by

S.K. Mitra, Calcutta, 1972; idem, *The Agrarian System in Ancient India*, Calcutta, 1930; N.N. Kher, *Agrarian and Fiscal Economy in the Mauryan and post-Mauryan Age*, Delhi, 1973. D.N. Jha, *Revenue system in post-Maurya and Gupta Times* (Calcutta, 1967), contains much relevant information on the taxation system, though it focuses on the subsequent period. On Maurya art, Niharranjan Ray, *Maurya and Post-Maurya Art* (Calcutta, 1976) remains the most lucid and authentic treatment of contemporary art; for a more recent analysis, however, see the relevant sections of Susan L. Huntington, *The Art of Ancient India*, New York, 1985.

Chapter 7: Invasions, Trade and Culture c. 200 BC–AD 300

The history of the period *c.* 200 BC-AD 300 covers a wide range of developments. Due to the constraints of space it is difficult to suggest a reading list which would take into account all of them. However, some of the important primary sources and modern works having good bibliographies may be mentioned.

The political history of the Shungas is largely based on the Puranic material collated by F.E. Pargiter in his *Dynasties of the Kali Age* (London, 1913), and on the *Malavikagnimitra* of Kalidasa translated into Hindi by S.R. Chaturvedi in *Kalidasa-Granthavali* (Bombay, 1950). Evidence relating to the Indo-Greeks is furnished by coins published in a number of catalogues such as A. Cunningham, *Coins of Alexander's Successors in the East* (London, 1873); R.B. Whitehead, *Catalogue of Coins in the Punjab Museum, Lahore,* I (London, 1914); V. Smith, *Catalogue of Coins in the Indian Museum Calcutta,* pt I (Oxford, 1906); J. Allan, *Catalogue of Coins in the British Museum, Ancient India* (London, 1936); P. Gardner, *Catalogue of Coins in the British Museum, Greek and Scythic Kings* (London, 1886). Relevant epigraphic material is found in Sten Konow, *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, ii (Oxford, 1929). *The Milindapanho* (Sanskrit, *Milindaprashna*) which is believed to be a record of dialogue between the Indo-Greek king Menander and the Buddhist Nagasena, is available in English as the *Questions of King Milinda* (Oxford, 1890-4). Other Buddhist sources for the early Christian centuries include the *Divyavadana* (eds, E.B. Cowell and F.A. Neil, Cambridge, 1886); *Lalitavistara* (ed, S. Lefmann, 2 vols, Halle, 1902-8) and *Mahavastu* (ed, E. Senart, 3 vols, Paris, 1882-97) and the Jatakas.

For important Satavahana inscriptions see *Epigraphia Indica*, vii and

viii; those of their successor dynasties may also be found in its relevant volumes. Numismatic evidence is available in E.J. Rapson, *Catalogue of Coins in the British Museum, Andhras and Western Ksatrapas* (London, 1913) and M. Rama Rao,. *Satavahana Coins in the Andhra Pradesh Government Museum* (Hyderabad, 1961). Among the more recent works on Satavahana coins are: A.M. Shastri, ed, *Coinage of the Satavahanas and Coins from Excavations* (Nagpur, 1972) and I.K. Sarma, *Coinage of the Satavahana Empire* (Delhi, 1980). For an analysis of developments in the far south both epigraphic and literary evidence is available. For the early Brahmi inscriptions found in Tamilnadu see: I. Mahadevan, 'Corpus of Tamil Brahmi Inscriptions', in R. Nagaswamy, ed, *Seminar on Inscriptions* (Madras, 1966).The English translation of some Shangam texts is available in J.V. Chelliah, *Ten Tamil Idylls* (Calcutta, 1947). K. Kailasapathy (*Tamil Heroic Poetry*, London, 1968) has analysed the Shangam poetry and T. Takahashi (*Tamil Love Poetry and Poetics*, Leiden, 1995) discusses, among other things, its chronology. Also see Kamil V. Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature,* Otto Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden, 1974; George L. Hart, *The Poems of Ancient Tamils: Their Milieu and their Sanskrit Counterparts,* Berkley, 1975.

A number of excavation reports and related publications are available. In addition to those mentioned in the previous chapter, a few of them may be listed here: John Marshall, *Taxila*, 3 vols, Cambridge, 1951, rpt, Varanasi, 1975; Herbert Hartel, 'Some Results of the Excavations at Sonkh', *German Scholars on India*, ii, Delhi, 1976; B.N. Chapekar, *Report on the Excavations at Ter*, Poona, 1969; S.B. Deo, *Mahurjhari Excavation (1970-72)*, Nagpur, 1973; idem and M.K. Dhavalikar, *Paunar Excavation*, Nagpur, 1968; idem and R.S. Gupte, *Excavation at Bhokardan*, Nagpur, 1974; M.G. Diksit, *Excavation at Kaundinyapur*, Bombay, 1968; H.D. Sankalia and S.B. Deo, *Report on the Excavations at Nasik and Jorwe*, Poona, 1955; idem, *From History to Prehistory at Nevasa*, Poona, 1960; idem, *Excavations at Maheshwar and Navdatoli*, Poona-Baroda, 1958; H. Sarkar and S.P. Nainar, *Amaravati*, New Delhi, 1972; idem and B.N. Misra, *Nagarjunakonda*, New Delhi, 1972; H.D. Sankalia and M.G. Diksit, *Excavations at Brahmapuri (Kolhapur) 1945-46*, Poona, 1952; idem, *Excavation at Devnimori*, Baroda, 1966; T.V. Mahalingam, *Report on the Excavations in the Lower Kavery Valley*, Madras, 1970; S.H. Ritti, ed, *A Decade of Archaeological Studies in South India*, Dharwar, 1978; K.V. Raman, ed, *Excavations at Uraiyur (Tiruchirapalli) 1965-69*, Madras, 1988; R.E.M. Wheeler, 'Brahmagiri and Chandravalli 1947: Megalithic and Other Cultures in Mysore State', *Ancient India*, no. 4 (1947-8); idem, 'Arikamedu:

An Indo-Roman Trading Station on the East Coast of India', *Ancien India*, no. 2 (1946); G. Yazdan, 'The Megaliths: Their Culture, Ecology Economy and Technology' in S.B. Deo and K. Paddayya, eds, *Recen Advances in Indian Archaeology*, Poona, 1988. Several monographs based largely on archaeological reports are important. E.g. R. Subrahmaniam, *Salihundam*, Hyderabad, 1964; M.K. Dhavalikar, *Sanchi: A Cultural Study*, Poona, 1965; K. Krishnamurthy, *Nagarjunakonda: A Cultural Study*, Delhi, 1977; A.H. Dani, *The Historic City of Taxila*, UNESCO, 1986; D.M. Srinivasan, ed, *Mathura: The Cultural Heritage*, Delhi, 1989; C. Margabandhu, *Archaeology of the Satavahana-Kshatrapa Times*, New Delhi, 1985.

For authentic reconstruction of the political history of the period see: H.C. Raychaudhuri, *Political History of Ancient India*; K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, ed, *Comprehensive History of India*, ii, Bombay, 1957, rpt, Delhi, 1987 For the history of Indo-Greeks see A.K. Narain, *The Indo-Greeks*, London, 1957. Besides, J.E. Van Lohuizen de Leeuw, *The Scythian Period* (Leiden, 1949) discusses the sources relating to the Scythian period. Several works of uneven merit deal specifically with the Kushanas: B.N. Puri, *India under the Kushanas*, Bombay, 1965; Rosenfield, *Dynastic Arts of the Kushanas,* Berkley, 1967, B. Chattopadhyay, *The Age of the Kushanas,* Calcutta, 1967; idem, *Kushana State and Indian Society,* Calcutta, 1975; B.N. Mukherjee, *The Kushanas and the Deccan*, Calcutta, 1968; idem, *The Economic Factors in Kushana History*, Calcutta, 1970; idem, *The Disintegration of the Kushana Empire*, Varanasi, 1976. Discussion of the sources relating to the Scythians is found in R. Ghirshman, *Begram* (Cairo, 1946) and are relevant to the study of Kushanas. P.T.S. Aiyangar, *History of the Tamils to 600 AD,* Madras, 1929; K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, *A History of South India*, Oxford, 1958; and G. Yazdani, ed, *The Early History of the Deccan*, Oxford, 1960, are relevant for the study of political developments in southern India. For a limited discussion of the process of state formation in south India see: Clarence Maloney, 'Archaeology in South India: Accomplishments and Prospects', in Burton Stein, ed, *Essays on South India*, New Delhi, 1976; Rajan Gurukkal, 'Forms of Production and Forces of Change in Ancient Tamil Country', *Studies in History* (New Series), v, no. 2 (1989). For an itemization of varied pieces of information culled from the Shangam literature see: N. Subramanian, *Sangam Polity,* Madras, 1966. Information on political ideas and institutions is available in a number of works of which T.V. Mahalingam's *South Indian Polity* (Madras, 1955) may be useful, though it lacks critical analysis of the

source material. R.S. Sharma deals with some of the features of the Satavahana polity (*Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India*) but does throw light on the problem of state formation in the far south.

Material on trade and trade-routes can be gathered from such primary sources as the Jatakas, Pliny's *Natural History* and Ptolemy's *Geography*. But the *Periplus of the Erythaean Sea*, trans. W.H. Schoff (London, 1912) is an indispensable original text for the study of India's trade contacts with the Western world during the early centuries of the Christian era. The work has also been edited by L. Casson under the title *Periplus Maris Erythaei: Text with Introduction, Translation and Commentary* (Princeton, 1989). Equally important source for reconstructing the history of trade consists of the Roman coins found in the Indian subcontinent which have been discussed in a large number of articles. But the following are the standard works on the subject: P.L. Gupta, *Punch-marked Coins in the Andhra Pradesh Government Museum*, Hyderabad, 1960; P.J. Turner, *Roman Coins from India*, London, 1989. The significance of these coins have been discussed by several scholars including B.D. Chattopadhyaya (*Coins and Currency Systems in South India*, Delhi, 1977). H.G. Rawlinson, *Intercourse between India and the Western World* (Cambridge, 1916), E.H. Warmington, *Commerce between the Roman Empire and India* (Cambridge, 1928) and R.E.M. Wheeler, *Rome Beyond Imperial Frontiers* (Pelican, 1951) are the pioneer works on the subject. All these scholarly studies have sought to provide historical justification for the British exploitation of Indian resources in modern times. In recent years a renewed interest in the Indian Ocean trade, especially India's commercial and cultural contact with the West in ancient times, has been in evidence and now several publications are available, some of which are: G. Pollet, ed, *India and the Ancient World: History, Trade and Culture before AD 650* (Prof. P.H.L. Eggermont Volume), Leuven, 1987; Vimala Begley and Richard Daniel De Puma, eds, *Rome and India: The Ancient Sea Trade*, Delhi, 1992; Marie-Francoise Boussac and Jean-Francois Salles, eds, *Athens, Aden, Arikamedu*, Delhi, 1995; Himanshu Prabha Ray and Jean-Francois Salles, eds, *Tradition and Archaeology: Early Maritime Contacts in the Indian Ocean*, Delhi, 1996; F.D. Romanis and A. Tchernia, eds, *Crossings: Early Mediterranean Contacts with India*, Delhi, 1997. Himanshu Prabha Ray focuses on the Satavahana trade in *Monastery and Guild* (Delhi, 1986) and devotes attention to India's trade relations with the Western world as well as with South-East Asia in *The Winds of Change* (Delhi, 1994), though she lays undue emphasis on the role of Buddhism. L. Boulnois,

The Silk Road, London, 1966, gives an interesting account of China's silk trade in which Indians participated. Kameshwar Prasad (*Cities, Crafts and Commerce under the Kushanas*, Delhi, 1984); Xinru Liu (*Ancient India and Ancient China*, Delhi, 1988) study trade between India on the one hand and China and Central Asia on the other. For a treatment of India's contact with Central Asia and China also see: P.C. Bagchi, *India and China* (Calcutta, 1944) and N.P. Chakravarti, *India and Central Asia* (Calcutta, 1927). Moti Chandra, *Sarthavaha* (Hindi), Patna, 1953 (English trans. *Trade and Trade Routes in Ancient India,* New Delhi, 1977) and relevant portions of G.L. Adhya, *Early Indian Economics*, Bombay, 1966 continue to provide a corrective to the Western imperialist perception of India's trade with the outside world. Information on guilds has been systemized by R.C. Majumdar (*Corporate Life in Ancient India*, Calcutta, 1918), though his work is now out of date. Primary data on arts, crafts and urbanization in the early centuries before and after Christ can be obtained from the excavation reports and writings on trade, though mention of some urban studies may be made here: H. Sarkar, 'Emergence of Urban Centres in Early Historical Andhradesa', in B.M. Pande and B.D. Chattopadhyaya, eds, *Archaeology and History: Essays in Memory of A. Ghosh,* Delhi, 1987; R. Champakalakshmi, *Trade, Ideology and Urbanization,* Delhi, 1996; V. Thakur, *Urbanisation in Ancient India*, Delhi, 1981. R.S. Sharma's seminal work *Urban Decay in India c. 300-c.1000* (Delhi, 1987) has, however, argued convincingly on the basis of archaeological material that urban centres in most parts of the country began to decline from the third/fourth century AD which has generated a fierce debate among scholars.

Studies of social structure and political ideas have largely been based on literary texts some of which have already been mentioned. Important brahmanical sources include the Dharmashastra texts like the *Manusmriti* (trans. G. Buhler, *Sacred Books of the East*, Oxford, 1886) and the *Vishnusmriti* (trans. J. Jolly, *Sacred Books of the East*, vii, Oxford, 1880), descriptions of the *Yugadharma* in the early Puranas (especially the *Vayupurana*, ed. Mansukhram Mor, Calcutta, 1959; *Vishnupurana*, Gita Press edn, vs 2009, *Brahmandapurana*, ed, Sriram Sharma Acharya, Mathura,1967), the *Shantiparva* of the *Mahabharata* (Gita Press edn, 1970-3) and the *Mahabhashya* of Patanjali (ed, F. Kielhorn, 3 vols, 1892-1909). For social history of the post-Maurya centuries see: Sibesh Chandra Bhattacharya, *Some Aspects of Indian Society from c. 2nd Century BC to c. 4th Century AD*, Calcutta, 1978; R.S. Sharma in his *Shudras in Ancient India*

discusses the position of shudras during the period; idem, 'The Kali Age: A Period of Social Crisis', in D.N. Jha, ed, *Feudal Social Formation in Early India*, Delhi, 1987 Several source-wise studies of social life and other aspects of history are available. For example see, B.N. Puri, *India as Known to Patanjali*, Bombay, 1957; M.M. Dass, *Women in Manu and His Seven Commentators*, Varanasi, 1963. R.N. Sharma in his *Brahmins Through the Ages* (Delhi, 1977) has devoted a section to the post-Maurya period and has culled references to different aspects of social and political life from the lawbook of Manu in *Ancient India as Known to Manu*, Delhi, 1980. These works lack historical perspective but are useful compendiums of information on society and polity. For the history of political, ideas and institutions see: N.C. Bandyopadhyaya, *Development of Hindu Polity and Political Theories*, Calcutta, 1927; U.N. Ghoshal, *A History of Indian Political Ideas*, Bombay, 1959; D.N. Jha, *Revenue system of Post-Maurya and Gupta Times*, Calcutta, 1967; B.P. Roy, *Political Ideas and Institutions in the Mahabharata*, Calcutta, 1975; A.K. Narain, 'The Kushan State: A Preliminary Study', in Henri J.M. Classen and Peter Skalnik, eds, *The Study of the State*, Mouton, 1981; Sudarshan Senviratne, 'Kalinga and Andhra: The Process of Secondary State Formation in Early India', *Indian Historical Review*, vii, nos. 1-2. For a critical analysis of the post-Maurya polity R.S. Sharma's *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions* is indispensable. Also see: J.W. Spellman, *Political Theory of Ancient India: A study of Kingship from the Earliest Times to Circa AD 300*, London, 1964.

There is a vast bulk of literature on religious developments and the following works may be consulted: A.K. Warder, *Indian Buddhism* (New Delhi, 1970); T.W. Rhys Davids, *Buddhism, Its History and Literature* (London, 1923); Edward Conze, *Buddhism: Its Essence and Development* (Oxford, 1951, rpt, New York, 1959); Jagnanderlal Jaini, *Outlines of Jainism* (Cambridge, 1940); N.R. Guseva, *Jainism* (Bombay, 1971); N.N. Bhattacharyya, *Jain Philosophy: Historical Outline* (New Delhi, 1976); Jan Gonda, *Aspects of Early Vishnuism* (2nd edn, Delhi, 1969); idem, *Vishnuism and Shaivism: A Comparison* (London, 1970). Unlike most scholars D.D. Kosambi ('The Historical Krishna', *The Times of India*, Annual Number, 1965); S. Jaiswal, *Origin and Development of Vaishnavism* (2nd revd edn, Delhi, 1981) have analysed the material basis of Vaishnavism. Of interest may also be D.D. Kosambi, 'Social and Economic Aspects of the *Bhagvad-Gita*', in *Myth and Reality*, Bombay, 1962. For the history of contemporary art and architecture see relevant portions of: Percy Brown, *Indian Architecture*, Bombay, 1959; Benjamin Rowland, *The Art and Architecture of*

India, Harmondsworth, 3rd revd edn, 1967; J.N. Banerjea, *Religion in Art and Archeology*, Lucknow, 1968;Vidya Dahejia, *Early Buddhist Rock Temples*, London, 1972; Susan L. Huntington, *The Art of Ancient India*, New York, 1985. Niharranjan Ray's *Maurya and Post-Maurya Art* (Calcutta, 1976), however, remains indispensable.

Chapter 8: The Myth of the Golden Age

The inscriptional material of the Gupta period is found in J.F. Fleet, ed, *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, iii (Calcutta, 1888, revd version by D.R. Bhandarkar, eds, B. Chhabra and G.S. Gai, New Delhi,1981; V.V. Mirashi, ed, *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, v, *Inscriptions of the Vakatakas*, Ootacamund, 1963; K.V. Ramesh and S.P. Tewari, eds, *A Copper-plate Hoard of the Gupta Period from Bagh, .Madhya Pradesh*, 1990; G.S. Gai, ed, *The Inscriptions of the Kadambas*, Delhi, 1996. For numismatic evidence see: John Allan, *Catalogue of the Coins of the Gupta Dynasty in the British Museum* (London, 1914) and A.S. Altekar, *Catalogue of the Gupta Gold Coins in the Bayana Hoard* (Bombay, 1954); idem, *Corpus of Indian Coins*, iv, *The Coinage of the Gupta Empire* (Varanasi, 1957).The travel account of the Chinese pilgrim Fa-hsien is available in English trans. by H.A. Giles, *The Travels of Fa-hsien* (Cambridge, 1923). Literary sources include Vishakhadatta's *Devichandraguptam*, the works of Kalidasa (trans. into Hindi by S.R. Chaturvedi in *Kalidasa-Granthavali*, Bombay, 1950), *Kamasutra* of Vatsyayana (English trans. K.R. Iyengar, Lahore, 1921) and the *Vishnupurana* (trans. H.H. Wilson, London, 1864-70). The English trans. of the contemporary legal texts are available in G. Buhler, *Sacred Laws of the Aryas* (Oxford, 1879-82) and J. Jolly, *The Minor Law Books* (Oxford, 1869). The first Sanskrit lexicon, *Namalinganushasana* (*Amarakosha*), attributed to Amarasimha, was edited by H.D. Sharma and N.G. Sardesai with the commentary of Kshirasvami and was published from Poona in 1941. The *Aryabhatiyam* of Aryabhata, the first Indian mathematician, was trans. by W.E. Clark (Chicago, 1930).The *Brihajjataka* (trans. V. Subramanya Sastri, Mysore, 1929) and *Brihatsmhita* (trans. V. Subramanya Sastri and M. Ramakrishna Bhat, 2 vols, Bangalore, 1947) ofVarahamihira contain references to social and economic life. For information about archaeological material found in the Gupta levels at various sites see the excavation reports mentioned in the bibliographies of Chapters 4-7 as well as *Ancient India*; and *Indian Archaeology—A Review;* and A. Ghosh, ed, *An Encyclopaedia of Indian Archaeology*, Delhi, 1989.

Of the many works on the Gupta period S. Krishnaswami Aiyangar, *Studies in Gupta History*, Madras, 1928 and R.D. Banerji, *The Age of the Imperial Guptas*, Varanasi, 1933 are the earlier ones. R.C. Majumdar and A.S. Altekar, eds, *The Vakataka-Gupta Age* (Lahore, 1946, rpt, Delhi, 1960) and R.C. Majumdar, ed, *The Classical Age*, vol III of the *History and Culture of the Indian People* (Bombay, 1954) are quite popular. Among the more recent studies mention may be made of B.G. Gokhale, *Samudra Gupta: Life and Times*, Bombay, 1962; S.R. Goyal, *History of the Imperial Guptas*, Allahabad, 1967; S.K. Maity, *Gupta Civilization*, Calcutta, 1974; idem, *The Imperial Guptas and their Times*, Delhi, 1975. But by far the most comprehensive work on the Guptas is P.L. Gupta, *The Imperial Guptas*, 2 vols, Varanasi, 1974-9.

S.K. Maity, *Economic Life in Northern India in the Gupta Period*, 2nd edn, Calcutta, 1970, is the first serious attempt to organize the economic data relating to the Gupta period. Before Independence a number of scholars wrote on agrarian system, especially the question of land-ownership, but their writings are inhibited by their nationalist zeal. U.N. Ghoshal's works (*Contribution to the History of Hindu Revenue System*, Calcutta, 1929, revd edn, Calcutta, 1972; *Agrarian System in Ancient India*, Calcutta, 1930, rpt, Calcutta, 1973) are comparatively balanced, though not completely free from the nationalist bias. For a different treatment of the history of land system and taxation during the Gupta period see: D.N. Jha, *Revenue System in Post-Maurya and Gupta Times*, Calcutta, 1977. For the first most critical analysis of sources bearing on the agrarian life and the evolution of feudal land tenure from the Gupta period onwards see: R.S. Sharma, 'The Origins of Feudalism in India', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, I, pt 3 (1958); *Indian Feudalism c. AD 300-1200*, Calcutta, 1965, 2nd edn, Delhi, 1980. Unlike Sharma, D.D. Kosambi has visualized two stages in the development of Indian feudalism (*Introduction to the Study of Indian History*, Bombay, 1956), though both agree that from the Gupta period onwards urban centres began to decline. The process of decay of towns forms the subject matter of Sharma's *Urban Decay c. 300-1000* (Delhi, 1987). The feudalism thesis has generated much heated debate which has been summed up by D.N. Jha in his introduction to *Feudal Social Formation in Early India*, Delhi, 1987. K.M. Shrimali's *Agrarian Structure in Central India and the Northern Deccan*, Delhi, 1987, a study based on Vakataka inscriptions, supports the feudalism theory. Sudhakar Chattopadhyaya (*Social Life in Ancient India in the Background of the Yajnavalkyasmriti*, Calcutta,

1965) has compiled information on caste, education, marriage, occupations, women, untouchability, etc. A similar exercise was undertaken much earlier by H.C. Chakladar (*Social Life in Ancient India: Studies in Vatsyayana's Kamasutra*, Calcutta, 1929) and B.S. Upadhyaya (*India in Kalidasa*, Delhi, 1968). The last two chapters of R.S. Sharma's *Shudras in Ancient India* are devoted to the position of lower orders during Gupta times. R.N. Sharma's treatment of the position of brahmanas in his *Brahmins Through the Ages* (Delhi, 1977) is inadequate. G.P. Upadhyay's *Brahmanas in Ancient India* (Delhi, 1979) is a competent study of the role of brahmanas though it does not deal with them specifically in the Gupta context. Chitrarekha Gupta, *The Kayasthas: A Study in the Formation and Early History of a Caste* (Calcutta, 1996) contains a brief discussion of the relevant Gupta evidence and provides a useful bibliography on the history of kayasthas. Writings on the history of women do not deal separately with the Gupta period and A.S. Altekar's *The Position of Women in Hindu Civilisation* (Varanasi, 1956) still remains influential despite various articles written from a feminist point of view. Shalini Shah, *The Making of Womanhood: Gender Relations in the Mahabharata* (Delhi, 1995) may be consulted for an interdisciplinary approach as well as for a bibliography on women's history in ancient India. Education during the Gupta period receives attention in A.S. Altekar, *Education in Ancient India* (Varanasi, 1965) and Radha Kumud Mookerji, *Ancient Indian Education: Brahmanical and Buddhist* (3rd edn, Delhi, 1969), though these works are useful for earlier periods as well. H.D. Sankalia's *The University of Nalanda* (Delhi, 1972) is a good study of a specific Buddhist centre of education. For various aspects of economic and social history R.S. Sharma, *Perspectives in Social and Economic History of Early India* (2nd revd edn, Delhi, 1995). D.N. Jha (*Revenue System in Post-Maurya and Gupta Times*, Calcutta, 1967) deals with agrarian system and taxation. For issues of polity, kingship and law see: V.R. Ramachandra Diksitar, *The Gupta Polity*, Madras, 1952; U.N. Ghoshal, *A History of Indian Political Ideas*, Bombay, 1959; R.S. Sharma, *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India*; J.D.M. Derret, *Religion, Law and the State in Ancient India* (New York, 1968); Robert Lingat, *The Classical Law of India*, Berkley, 1973. Unlike the above mentioned works which deal with early India as a whole, Madhukar M. Patkar's *Narada, Brihaspati and Katyayana: A Comparative Study in Judicial Procedure* (Delhi, 1978) seeks to analyse the legal texts of the Gupta period. There are quite a few works dealing with the evolution of early Indian mythology and religious sects, though

none of them is devoted exclusively to the Gupta period. The following works, however, may be of much value: R.G. Bhandarkar, *Vaishnavism, Shaivism and Minor Religious Systems* (Strassburg, 1913); Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Hindu Myths: A Sourcebook Translated from the Sanskrit*, Baltimore, 1975; idem, *Asceticism and Eroticism in the Mythology of Shiva*; J. Gonda, *Aspects of Early Vishnuism*, 2nd edn, Delhi, 1969; idem, *Vishnuism and Shivaism: A Comparison*, Delhi, 1976; Sukumar Dutt, *Buddhist Monks and Monasteries of India*, London, 1962; A.K. Warder, *Indian Buddhism*, Delhi, 1970; R.S. Sharma, 'Material Milieu of Tantricism', in R.S. Sharma, ed, *Indian Society: Historical Probings*, Delhi, 1974; S. Jaiswal, *The Origin and Development of Vaishnavism*, 2nd edn, Delhi, 1981. D.P. Chattopadhyaya, *Indian Philosophy: A Popular Introduction* (Delhi, 1964) and A.K. Warder, *Outline of Indian Philosophy* (Delhi, 1971) are good introductory readings on the development of philosophical ideas. For works devoted exclusively to the art and architecture of the Gupta period see: Prithvi Kumar Agrawala, *Gupta Temple Architecture*, Varanasi, 1968; V.S. Agrawala, *Gupta Art: A History of Indian Art in the Gupta Period* (1st pub. in 1948, rpt, Calcutta, 1977; Pratapaditya Pal, *The Ideal Image: The Gupta Sculptural Tradition and Its Influence*, New York, 1978; J.C. Harle, *Gupta Sculpture: Indian Sculpture of the Fourth to the Sixth Centuries* AD, Oxford, 1974. Frederick M. Asher, *The Art of Eastern India, 300-800*, Minneapolis, 1980 is a study of Gupta and post-Gupta sculptures from Bihar, West Bengal and Bangladesh. A detailed study of Ajanta is by Sheila L. Weiner (*Ajanta: Its Place in Buddhist Art*, Berkley, 1977) and G. Yazdani, *Ajanta*, 4 vols, London, 1930-55, is a profusely illustrated study of Ajanta murals. For a comprehensive treatment of the different facets of the Gupta art Joanna G. Williams, *The Art of Gupta India*, Princeton, 1982 is recommended. Several works deal with literary history of ancient India and devote adequate space to the developments in the Gupta period. For example see: A.B. Keith, *A History of Sanskrit Literature*, Oxford, 1920; Sushilkumar De, *History of Sanskrit Literature*, Calcutta, 1947; S.N. Dasgupta, *A History of Sanskrit Literature* (Classical Period), Calcutta, 1962. D.M. Bose *et al*, eds, *A Concise History of Science India*, New Delhi, 1971, contains substantial material on scientific developments during the Gupta period.

Index